

## PLATO'S SEVENTH LETTER

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LUDWIG EDELSTEIN

PLATO'S SEVENTH LETTER



LEIDEN  
E. J. BRILL  
1966

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BY

LUDWIG EDELSTEIN



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Haroldo Frederico Cherniss  
per dies faustos infaustosque  
amico firmo ac fideli



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## PREFACE

The first outline of this book was written during my stay at the Institute for Advanced Study in 1959-1960, and so I should like first to express my gratitude to the Faculty of the Institute, who made it possible for me to devote this whole year to research. I also owe much to the conversations on Plato and many another subject that I had during that time with members of the Institute, especially with G.M.A. Grube and Erwin Panofsky.

But I must mention too my indebtedness to those with whom I discussed the Seventh Epistle long before the writing of the book was undertaken. In 1939, Paul Friedländer spent several months with Mrs. Edelstein and myself reading and interpreting Plato's "autobiography." In later years, between 1948 and 1950, many an hour was passed in controversy over the document with Ernst Kantorowicz, P. Friedländer, and Father A. J. Festugière. None of them, I am afraid, was in agreement with the views which have now found expression in this study. But they made me see difficulties I would otherwise not have noted and I have tried to learn from their objections.

The dedication expresses a debt of gratitude that arises out of a long fellowship in work and life. But I should say that when I was in Princeton, I often talked to Harold Cherniss about the Seventh Letter; he has also read over the finished manuscript and given me his advice on controversial points. And when I was writing and revising the text I had the constant help of Miss Caroline Clauser. Her devotion to the work and her vigilance saved me from many an error in thought and expression.

New York, March 11, 1964

L.E.

An untimely death prevented Professor Edelstein from seeing his book through the press. The editors of this series therefore took upon themselves the correction of the proofs as against the manuscript as submitted by the author.



## INTRODUCTION

During the past three or four decades, the genuineness of Plato's Seventh Letter has become almost an axiom of Platonic scholarship. While there are still a few left who reject the document as unauthentic, the overwhelming majority of interpreters find in it Plato's own story of his life and his intellectual development as well as one of his last statements on central issues of his philosophy.<sup>1)</sup> Largely in consequence of the acceptance of the Seventh Letter, there has even arisen a new concept of Plato, the man, and of his work. Plato, the metaphysician, has turned into Plato, the statesman. "In search of the ideal state," one has said, he "found the realm of Ideas" on the wayside, as it were; he was a philosopher "almost *faute de mieux*."<sup>2)</sup> Moreover, a greater emphasis has been placed on reconstructing the doctrine of the old Plato, and his teaching in the Academy, which is not recorded in the dialogues. For the Seventh Letter seems to warrant the assumption that there was a Platonic theory not put down in writing by its author.<sup>3)</sup>

What are the reasons for assuming the genuineness of the Seventh Letter? For thus the problem must be put, as no one would deny. The genuineness of letters presumably written in the fourth century is always open to suspicion. And the history of the attestation of the Seventh Letter does not even provide evidence to the effect that the letter was known in the time in which it was ostensibly written. Despite the richness of its information, it is not mentioned by Aristotle or any of the members of the Old Academy or of the Peripatus. A collection of Platonic letters is included in early Hellenistic catalogues of Platonic writings, but the Seventh Letter is quoted and referred to as Platonic for the first time by Cicero.<sup>4)</sup> Of

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1) For the history of the interpretation of the letters and the recent literature, cf. Friedländer, *Platon*, I<sup>2</sup>, chap. XIII, pp. 249 ff.; also J. Souilhé, *Platon, Oeuvres Complètes*, XIII, 1, 1949, pp. V ff.; and now H. Cherniss, "Plato (1950-1957)", *Lustrum*, 1959, 4, pp. 88 ff.

2) The former characterization is taken from Friedländer, I, 1<sup>2</sup>, p. 6; also 105 f.; the latter from Ph. Merlan, "Form and Content in Plato's Philosophy", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, VIII, 1947, p. 415.

3) H. Gomperz, *Platons Selbstbiographie*, 1928, pp. 45 f.

4) E.g. *Tuscul. Disput.*, V, 35, 100. R. Adam (*Archiv f. Gesch. d. Philos.*, 23, 1910) thought to discover a reference to the Epistle in Eusebius, *Praep. Evang.*, 15, 2 = Aristoxenus Fr. 64 [Wehrli], and he is followed in this claim

course, this does not mean that the letter could not have been written earlier. Important testimonies have not infrequently been neglected, and the scarcity of the Hellenistic literary material, and the fact that only fragments of the Academic and Peripatetic writings are extant, may explain why no one is known to have made use of the letter before the first century B.C.

Recognizing that in any case the burden of proof lies with those who consider the letter genuine, some interpreters have claimed that its authenticity is demonstrated by the agreement between the letter's report on events in Sicily and those to be found in ancient historians. But such agreement would merely show that the author was familiar with the historical background. It does not guarantee, or even make it likely, that he was Plato. Even a forger could have been rightly informed about the general historical situation.<sup>5</sup>) Scrutiny of the language has led to the result that with the exception of perhaps a few phrases it appears to be Platonic. The style of the letter resembles the style of the old Plato. But neither terminological nor stylistic identity is sufficient evidence of genuineness. There is always a chance that someone imitated Plato's art of writing even to perfection.<sup>6</sup>)

So the decision must in the end rest on the interpretation of the content of the letter, a procedure which, in practice if not in theory, is followed by all interpreters.

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by A. Diès, *Autour de Platon*, II, 1927, p. 269. (H. Cherniss drew my attention to the latter work.) But Epistle VII, 350 D — the passage supposedly quoted by Aristoxenus — speaks of *πλάνη καὶ ἀτυχία*, while Eusebius says *πλάνη καὶ ἀποδημία*. The word *πλάνη* in connection with travel is not so unusual an expression that it could not occur to someone talking about Plato's travels without his having read the Seventh Letter. (The story told by Aristoxenus seems to deal with Aristotle's secession from the Academy [cf. also Aelian, *Varia Hist.*, IV, 9], which he dates in the time of Plato's absence from Athens.) See also Morrow, *Plato's Epistles*, p. 38, note 30. On the attestation of the letters in general, see Harward, *The Platonic Epistles*, pp. 59 ff.; 64 ff.; Boas, *Philos. Rev.*, 1948, p. 453.

<sup>5</sup>) It seems, therefore, impossible to say with Stenzel ("Der Begriff d. Erleuchtung bei Platon", *Kl. Schr.*, pp. 151 ff.) that in the case of the Seventh Letter as well as that of the *Laws* the decision "durch äussere Kriterien erfolgt ist" (p. 152). For the modern historians of whose investigations he thinks—such as Grote and Meyer—have at most shown that details given in the letter could be historical, not to mention the fact that none of them accepts all the data mentioned in the letter as trustworthy (cf. below, p. 57).

<sup>6</sup>) On the language of the letter in general, see Harward, pp. 86 ff.; Shorey (*What Plato Said*, p. 41) thinks that for reasons of style the letter cannot be later than one or two generations after Plato (See also below, p. 60).



That is, one can only ask whether the "autobiography of Plato"—what is told about his intellectual development and his attitude toward philosophy and politics—is in accord with what is implied by his dialogues, as well as with other biographical accounts; and furthermore, whether the so-called philosophical digression setting forth Plato's views on the attainment and communication of knowledge can be reconciled with the philosophy contained in his own writings. Especially with regard to the latter topic, one will, of course, have to make allowance for some discrepancies. The document under investigation is meant to be a letter, not a treatise, a personal statement, not a scholarly pronouncement; diversity of interests and problems may produce answers that merely seem to be different. Yet, ultimately, one cannot avoid the question of whether the doctrine of the dialogues can possibly form a unity with that of the letter, whether it appears likely that Plato, the author of the dialogues, is the man who speaks in the epistle.

My interpretation, too, is based on the generally recognized principle I have outlined. If I differ from others in its application, I do so only in so far as I have tried to use it as comprehensibly as possible, giving almost a running commentary on the text of the letter. Sections of the epistle, especially the philosophical digression, have, of course, been scrutinized in all minutiae. The annotated editions have clarified a great number of particular problems.<sup>7)</sup> But usually, the argument centers on this or that statement, on whether or not it is Platonic in origin. My endeavor has been to analyze the document as a whole, to bring out the interrelation between the single assertions of importance. In consequence, my inquiry has turned into a monograph. But I thought it permissible to treat the document in which Plato might be speaking about his own philosophy for the first and last time, in his own name, with that attention and care that it is usual to bestow upon a Platonic dialogue, even upon one of the so-called smaller dialogues.

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<sup>7)</sup> Of the commentaries, I mention especially F. Novotny, *Platonis Epistulae* (Opera Facultatis Philosophicae Universitatis Masarykianae Brunensis 1930) and J. Harward, *The Platonic Epistles*, 1932. They, together with R. G. Bury's *Prefatory Notes* (Plato, The Loeb Classical Library V, 1929), have been of the greatest assistance to me. The translation of quotations from the Seventh Letter is also Bury's. These works, as well as R. S. Bluck, *Plato's Seventh and Eighth Letters* (1947) and G. R. Morrow, *Plato's Epistles* (1962, a revised edition of his *Studies in the Platonic Epistles*, 1935), will be referred to by author's name only.

Since a great part of the letter deals with historical matters, my interpretation also is occupied with facts as much as with questions of philosophy, while the modern discussion usually centers on the latter. This shift in emphasis implies that one has to deal with much data which may seem to the devotee of Plato to be of little consequence as compared with Plato's teaching. But this shortcoming is inherent in the task it seemed necessary to undertake.

One more deviation of my approach from the one commonly adopted should, I think, be mentioned. To the discussion of the historical report and of the philosophical digression, I have added a comparison of the Seventh Letter with the other letters preserved under the name of Plato. They are, to a great extent, concerned with the same matters that are at stake in the Seventh Epistle. To arrive at a full understanding of the latter seems to require that the picture it gives of persons and events and of Platonism be related to the tradition presented in the rest of the epistles. Certainly, many of the problems involved are seen in a clearer light through such a comparative analysis of the twelve letters that, in addition to the seventh, make up the collection that has been preserved.

The result of my investigation, I confess, is that the Seventh Letter cannot be genuine. If one begins, as I have done, by assuming that the letter is what it purports to be, one soon becomes more and more doubtful; the further one reads, the more one meets with assertions which can hardly have been made by Plato; finally, one is forced to give up the belief in the Platonic origin of the letter. This is not to say that the letter is without value. Though it is not Plato's own *professio fidei*, it is, I think, an interesting and rather important interpretation of Plato's life and doctrine which must go back to the first decades after his death.

# I

## THE HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

### I. PLATO'S YOUTH AND EARLY MANHOOD

At the outset of the Seventh Letter—written in reply to Dion's relatives and associates who, after his death, had assured Plato that their policy was that of Dion's and asked him for his support in "deed and word" (ἔργῳ καὶ λόγῳ [323 D])—Plato promises his assistance if it is indeed true that those who solicit his help are in agreement with the thoughts and intentions of Dion; if not, he will have to think the matter over (324 A). What was in Dion's mind he knows "not from mere conjecture, but from certain knowledge" (*ibid.*).<sup>1</sup>) For he made Dion's acquaintance on his first trip to Sicily when he was forty years of age and Dion about twenty. Since the latter never wavered in his political opinions, it would not surprise Plato if Hipparinus, the son of Dion and the present leader of the followers of Dion, shared his policy.<sup>2</sup>) However, it seems opportune to Plato to tell, "from the beginning," how Dion came to adopt his convictions (324 B). With these words, the letter makes the transition to Plato's "autobiography" and the report of his first Sicilian visit (324 B-326 E).<sup>3</sup>)

It was, says Plato, his wish to enter public life as soon as he had become "his own master" (324 B), that is, when he was about eighteen years old. But "fateful changes" in the political situation made it impossible for him to follow his inclinations.<sup>4</sup>) The reign of the Thirty, the evil deeds committed by those in power, deterred him

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<sup>1</sup>) These words are not chosen by chance, see note 3.

<sup>2</sup>) For Hipparinus as the son of Dion, see e.g. Harward, pp. 195 f., and below, III, note 70.

<sup>3</sup>) The manner in which the autobiography is introduced is sometimes thought to be abrupt and thus characteristic of the digressional style of the old Plato (e.g. Harward *ad* 324 b 8). But there is justification for talking about Plato and his views. The account of Plato's life shows that he inspired the views of Dion (327 A) and must therefore be familiar with them, as he claimed to be at the beginning. That is why the account is "timely" (324 B).

<sup>4</sup>) The words τύχαι τινὲς τῶν τῆς πόλεως πραγμάτων are rarely given their due importance (below, note 131). Concerning Plato's age at the time at which the autobiographical account begins, cf. Friedländer, *Platon*, I<sup>2</sup>, p. 5.

from taking an active part in politics (324 B-325 A). After the re-establishment of democracy, he was again drawn toward political action, though now his desire was not as strong. But again, his plans came to naught. This government, too, committed crimes and injustices (325 B-C). He then began to understand how difficult a task it was to govern a state (C-D). Still hoping for an opportunity for political action in Athens (326 A)—a moment that apparently failed to come—he pondered the possibility of improvement in the affairs of state and finally arrived at the conclusion that there would be no end to political unrest until philosophers had become rulers, or rulers philosophers. It was with this view firmly fixed in his mind that Plato, in 388, arrived in Italy and Sicily, where he was to meet Dion.<sup>5)</sup>

What strikes one first in this short autobiographical text preceding the account of the visit to Sicily is the assertion that Plato intended, from his early youth on, to become a statesman. For this is not the story that is usually told. Aristotle implies that Plato chose philosophy as his career (*Metaphysics* I, 6, *init.*), and the same is maintained by later biographers. Though they speak of the young Plato's artistic interests, of his desire to become a poet, they know nothing of his having cherished political ambitions before he became a philosopher, let alone before the Sicilian venture.<sup>6)</sup> Who, then, is to be believed—Plato, or his biographers?

At first glance, the interpreter may feel that he must put his trust in Plato. What can he do but accept Plato's account of his own life?<sup>7)</sup> And is it not even to be expected that under the conditions prevailing in the Athens of the fifth century a young aristocrat would want to enter into politics? But, disregarding the fact that many of the Presocratics who devoted their lives to philosophy were descended from aristocratic families, one must, after all, allow for the possibility that Plato did what was unusual or unconventional.<sup>8)</sup> Again, some modern critics say that the Seventh

<sup>5)</sup> Plato's first Sicilian voyage is dated by his assertion that he was forty when he made Dion's acquaintance.

<sup>6)</sup> The representation of Plato as a philosopher from early youth on (e.g. Diogenes Laertius, III, 5-6) probably derives from Aristotle's version of his development; that Plato's political interests are not mentioned by the biographical tradition has been noted by G. Boas, *Philos. Rev.*, 1948, p. 443.

<sup>7)</sup> This is the opinion of Friedländer (I<sup>2</sup>, p. 9).

<sup>8)</sup> The *Republic* (VI, 494 D) expressly admits that a young aristocrat, though he might wish to become a statesman, would turn to philosophy were he counselled to do so.

Letter must be trusted just because it shows that Plato the political theorist was at heart a political reformer yearning for action. All political and moral theories, they maintain, imply value judgments and, as such, are but rationalizations of desires, derived from volition rather than from cognition; one would, in any case, have to assume what Plato himself attests.<sup>9)</sup> Convincing as this argumentation may seem to some, it surely does not have the authority of a scientific truth which others may not feel free to reject. And, assuming that the letter is Plato's, how is one to explain the fact that Aristotle and later biographers deviate from it? Should his self-testimony not have been the basis of the ancients' representation of Plato's life?

Moreover, it is not only with regard to the claim that Plato was a statesman who turned philosopher that the letter is repudiated.<sup>10)</sup> The biographical tradition also sees the whole development of his thought otherwise than it is outlined in the letter. The epistle mentions no one with whom Plato studies. Even Socrates is called simply his "aged friend" (324 E), or his "associate" (ἑταῖρος [325 B]). These epithets surely would not lead anyone to suppose that Plato was a disciple of Socrates.<sup>11)</sup> That they are not chosen at random, but are selected consciously is clear from the manner in which the growth of Plato's political conceptions is explained. When the Thirty came to power, he held the belief—and this, "owing to his youth," was "in no way surprising"—that they would administer the state "by leading it out of an unjust way of life into a just way" (324 D). He was disappointed, and "indignantly" withdrew "from the evil practices then going on" (325 A). Obviously, he had in addition learned a lesson from his experience. For when democracy was re-established, he was more cautious in his expectations; he was "less urgently impelled with a desire to take part in public and political affairs" (*ibid.*). Again, what happened gave him pause.

<sup>9)</sup> Cf. H. Kelsen, "Platonic Love," *The American Imago*, III, 1-2, 1942, pp. 86-88.

<sup>10)</sup> Karsten was perhaps the first to characterize the Plato of the Seventh Letter as πολιτικός ἀνὴρ (*Commentatio critica de Platonis quae feruntur Epistolis*, 1864, p. 25), and rightly, though even according to the letter, Plato's political theory presupposes philosophy (see below, p. 18 f.).

<sup>11)</sup> Burnet (*Plato's Phaedo*, 1937) rightly says, with reference to 324 D: "Plato does not say a word . . . about having been a disciple of Socrates . . ." (p. XXVIII). I note that Socrates is called "an associate of ours" (τοῦ ἑταίρου ἡμῶν) in the *Phaedo* (118 A), but in the letter the word ἑταῖρος has a special meaning (below, note 10).

He considered the events and the men who were in charge, and the more he thought, the more he advanced in age (325 C), "the more difficult appeared to [him] the task of managing affairs of State rightly" (*ibid.*). He became "confused" by his reflections and observations (325 E), yet "continued to consider by what means some betterment could be brought about in these matters"—the political situation—and "also in the government as a whole."<sup>12</sup> When he finally looked "at all States which now exist," he perceived "that one and all, they are badly governed" (326 A), in need of "some marvellous overhauling and good luck to boot" (*ibid.*).<sup>13</sup> It was then that "he was compelled" to declare that philosophy enables one to discern all forms of justice, both political and individual, "and that political leadership must be in the hands of philosophers if there is to be any salvation for mankind" (326 B). Clearly, then, the doctrine of the *Republic* is here represented as the outcome of Plato's learning from life, from experience, and his reflection upon it; he had no human teachers.

But according to Aristotle (*Metaphysics* I, 6), Socrates is, of course, the one who influenced Plato most strongly, and Plato's bent is theoretical rather than practical. The biographies attribute to Socrates' influence Plato's abandonment of his literary interests and his conversion to philosophy.<sup>14</sup> And even if Plato was in truth concerned with politics rather than philosophy, he himself pictures Socrates as teaching that the state must be just, that the first thing in politics is concern for the state itself (*Apology*, 36 E), respect for laws (*Crito*, 50 A ff.). Socrates is for him the only true statesman (*Gorgias*, 521 D). While the dialogues suggest strongly that Plato's encounter with Socrates was crucial for his life,

<sup>12</sup> This statement means, I think, that Plato turned from the particular problems he faced as an Athenian citizen to an analysis of politics in general, which led him to the idea of the state. Such an approach to the truth is in agreement with the epistemology given later in the letter (below, p. 109).

<sup>13</sup> The similarity between 326 A and *Republic* V, 473 C-D has been noted by Shorey (*ad loc.*); but see below, note 62.

<sup>14</sup> For the break in Plato's development as seen by the ancients, cf. Zeller II, 1<sup>4</sup>, p. 397 ff. (It is noteworthy that according to Diogenes Laertius III, 6, Plato met Socrates when he was eighteen or twenty, that is, at the age when according to the letter he wanted to enter into political life.) From *Doxographi Graeci*, p. 484 (Diels), it follows that Theophrastus discussed Plato's natural philosophy without any reference to the influence of Socrates or of any of the Presocratics (G. C. Field, *Plato and his Contemporaries*, 1930, pp. 218 f.). But this, of course, does not mean that Theophrastus would have denied Plato's indebtedness to others.

the letter says no more than that Socrates was in Plato's opinion "the most just of men then living" (324 E).<sup>15</sup>) The charge made against him was a "most unholy" charge, which "Socrates of all men least deserved" (325 B). But the dangers in which he became involved through the schemes of the Thirty (324 E-325 A) and his condemnation and death through the persecution under the democracy (B-C) are recounted without emotion; they are merely warnings against the aspirations of the young Plato. From his autobiography, where for once he speaks in his own name, one could never guess the significance his relation with Socrates had for him.<sup>16</sup>)

For all these reasons, I think, one is tempted to doubt the authenticity of the assertions made in the letter. Of course, one may say that it tells how Plato came to see his life and wanted others to see it. He had reached his seventy-fifth year when he wrote the account of his development.<sup>17</sup>) Old men do not always recall the past as it actually was, and many an autobiography is a mixture of "truth and poetry." But such a solution would be satisfactory only if the genuineness of the letter were assured. This, however, is not the case. And one cannot overlook the fact that such an account as is given in the Seventh Letter could, at least in one essential point, be made up without much difficulty by another person.

For, when the writer states that Plato's wish to become a statesman "was the same as that of many others" (324 B), he concedes, like modern interpreters, that it is natural for the scion of one of the aristocratic families of Athens to embark on a political career. He is predestined by rank and tradition to play a role in the govern-

<sup>15</sup>) The phrase recalls *Phaedo*, 118 A; but there, Socrates is also "the best" (ἄριστος) and "wisest" (φρονιμώτατος) of all men.

<sup>16</sup>) Friedländer has pointed out (*I<sup>2</sup>*, p. 136) that the impersonality of the reference to Socrates is in contrast with the feeling pervading the dialogues, and he interprets Plato's reticence in this respect as unwillingness to bare his heart. But what Plato says about Dion (e.g. 237 A-B; 351 C) shows clearly that he can be uninhibited in expressing his sentiments.

<sup>17</sup>) The time at which the Seventh Letter was supposedly written is uncertain. F. Egermann (*Die Platonischen Briefe VII und VIII*, Diss. Berlin, 1928, pp. 16 f.) dates it immediately after Dion's death (354/3), Bluck (p. 22), in 354, and Harward (p. 192), around 353. G. Hell ("Zur Datierung des siebenten u. achten Briefes," *Hermes*, 67, 1932, pp. 295 ff.) has shown that some time must have elapsed since Dion's assassination, and that the letter was composed after Callippus' expulsion in 352/1 (p. 301). Whatever the exact date the author has in mind, he thinks of Plato as being in his middle seventies.

ment of his city, and the letter emphasizes this fact by adding that the Thirty, "some of whom were actually connections and acquaintances of mine, invited me at once to join their administration, thinking it would be congenial" (324 D).<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, Plato's belief that the Thirty would establish a just reign was, according to the letter, "owing to his youth, in no way surprising" (*ibid.*). His is the moral optimism characteristic of a young man not yet familiar with the ways of the world, an optimism which the *Republic* too considers characteristic of that age (III, 409 A-B; E). Then, as often happens, life's lessons turn youthful illusion and trustfulness into a maturer wisdom. As Plato again puts it, most of the young, who through the Sophists' teaching have imbibed wrong concepts—if given sufficient time and allowed to grow older—come into direct contact with things and are "compelled by suffering" to grasp them clearly; freed of their false notions, they begin to see reality as it is (*Sophist*, 234 D-E).<sup>19</sup> In fact, the aim of philosophical instruction is precisely to enable the young to grasp the truth "without suffering" (E). Thus, there is nothing in the account of Plato's life that an outsider could not say as well as Plato. The epistle gives a typical rather than an individual picture of Plato's development, while the personal data which appear in the biographies of others—such as his literary interests and his study of philosophy with Cratylus and Socrates—are absent.<sup>20</sup>

Once one realizes this, one begins to pay more serious attention to other data that raise difficulties for the interpreter. It is surely hard to believe that Plato could at any time in his life have spoken of Socrates' death as caused "by some chance" or "ill-luck" (325 B). His judgment of the restored democracy in comparison with that he passes on the régime of the Thirty seems more favorable

<sup>18</sup> Thus the *Republic* speaks of the young man, rich and well born, who thinks himself capable of managing the affairs of both Greeks and barbarians and is drawn into politics by his friends (VI, 494 C-E; cf. also B).

<sup>19</sup> The expression διὰ παθημάτων ἀναγκάζομενον recalls the letter's ἡναγκάσθη (326 A), used in connection with Plato's final formulation of his political theory. But usually, the dialogues refer to the compelling force of truth (e.g. *Republic* VI, 499 B, the passage which the letter obviously follows), not that of suffering, which the epistle stresses. Needless to add, Plato's description of the young is not unique (see e.g. Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, II, 12).

<sup>20</sup> Harward's contention that the Seventh Epistle is "one of the most remarkable pieces of self-revelation to be found in ancient literature" (p. 72, cf. also Gomperz, *Platons Selbstbiographie*, 1928, pp. 39 f.) is, I think, not borne out by the facts; cf. also below, note 144.



than one would have supposed.<sup>21)</sup> Finally, there is a strange coincidence between the course of his life, as outlined in the epistle, and the development of Socrates, as described in the *Phaedo*. Twice, Plato hoped for the opportunity to become a statesman and his expectations were disappointed. The third step, as it were, was his turn to philosophy, and more specifically, to political theory. According to the *Phaedo*, Socrates made two futile attempts to find the truth. He succeeded in laying hold upon it at the third try.<sup>22)</sup> Plato first hoped that the oligarchs would do what was right; then he considered the possibility that democracy would fulfill his expectations. Disappointed by the two forms of government prevalent in his time, he formulated his own vision of the true state. Socrates studied philosophical naturalism and the teleological systems of Anaxagoras. Finding fault with the two approaches tried hitherto, he started on his "second voyage," he took refuge in the theory of Ideas.<sup>23)</sup>

One cannot deny on principle that Plato's life and Socrates' life—if Plato represents it historically—were quite similar. Nor is it inconceivable that in his old age Plato gave a colored version of the views he held in his youth and early manhood, that he saw even Socrates' death, not as a self-sacrifice for the sake of philosophy, but as a chance event or ill-luck.<sup>24)</sup> But in order to believe

<sup>21)</sup> The intentions of the Thirty as stated in 324 D are in general agreement with what Lysias (XII, 5) says about them, and Novotny (*ad loc.*) suggests that they reflect the promise actually made by the oligarchs. Wendland has noted the similarity between 324 E and Xenophon, *Hellen.* II, 3, 38 (*apud* R. Adam, "Über die platonischen Briefe," *Archiv f. Gesch. d. Philos.*, XXIII, 1910, p. 42). Such parallels do not, of course, prove either the genuineness or the spuriousness of the letter.

<sup>22)</sup> The correspondence of the two autobiographies was first noted by Misch (*Gesch. d. Autobiographie*, I, 1, pp. 124 f.). Friedländer (I<sup>2</sup>, pp. 253 f.) later traced the identity in the use of key words such as *ἐδυσχέρανα*. The phrase *ἀπὸ δὲ θαυμαστῆς ἐλπίδος . . . ὥχόμεν φερόμενος* (*Phaedo*, 98 B), which Socrates uses to describe his disappointment in Anaxagoras' philosophy, would aptly describe Plato's political disappointment. Moreover, like the Plato of the letter, the Socrates of the *Phaedo* seems to have had no teacher; he is an autodidact, who studies philosophy and philosophical writings by himself (96 E-97 C). For the imitation of *Phaedo*, 118 A, see above, notes 11 and 15.

<sup>23)</sup> The letter later mentions tyrannies, oligarchies, and democracies as the three defective forms of government (326 D; cp. *Politicus*, 291 D ff.). But here (324 C), with a view to the situation in the Athens of Plato's time, it reduces the types of government to two.

<sup>24)</sup> For the difference between the treatment of Socrates' death in the *Apology* and in the letter, see Misch, I, 1, p. 125.

that this was the case, the interpreter, again, would have to be assured of the genuineness of the letter. A close reading of the first section of the autobiography alone justifies, then, the assertion that this is not as easy a matter as modern interpreters are inclined to assume and that unless the interpreter can find an objective criterion that will help him to establish the letter as Plato's own work, the alternative that it is the work of someone else cannot simply be disregarded.

It does not stand differently when one turns from the account of Plato's early youth and manhood to the account which follows it of his first visit to Italy and Sicily (326 B-327 B). The mode of life he encountered there did not impress him favorably. What the inhabitants call " 'the blissful life' " "replete as it is with Italian and Syracusan banquetings" (326 B), with "feastings and drinkings and the vigorous pursuit of their amours" (D)—such a life seemed to him likely to bring about constant changes in government from tyranny to oligarchy and to democracy, and not to be conducive to good government, "just government with equal laws (δικαίου καὶ ἰσονόμου πολιτείας [*ibid.*]). One is somewhat astonished to find such a vehement denunciation of Sicilian customs (cf. 336 D) in a letter addressed to Sicilians. But since Dion himself had overcome the allurements of pleasure and luxury and is praised on that account (327 B), one may assume that the purpose of the letter is to lead his friends as well toward the right kind of life.<sup>25</sup> One cannot help being startled, however, by the terms used to describe Plato's political idea. Just government with equal laws surely is not the principle embodied in the constitution of the *Republic*, whose ideal of the philosopher-king had, according to the letter, already been formulated by Plato by the time he reached Italy (326 B). To the contrary, the *Republic* describes "the devotee of equality" (ἰσονομικοῦ ἀνδρός) with deadly irony (VIII, 561 E).<sup>26</sup> Even the *Laws*, at which

<sup>25</sup>) Since such a condemnation of Sicilian customs seems out of place in a letter sent to the leaders of the Sicilians, Harward suggests that the document is actually addressed to all Greeks and that the letter of Dion's followers, which provides the starting point for Plato's answer, is a literary device he invented (p. 190). Bluck (*ad* 326 B) holds that "Plato's remarks in our present passage can be sufficiently accounted for by his desire for reform alone." I think that the statement made is understandable within its context, though it has a special meaning when considered in the light of the intentions of the author (see below, p. 64). For Sicilian life as described in the dialogues, see *Gorgias*, 518 B; *Republic*, III, 404 D.

<sup>26</sup>) It is debatable whether or not 326 B implies that the *Republic* had

Plato must have been working when the letter was composed, advocates a mixture of equality (V, 741 A) and inequality, which is "the source of the greatest good to individuals and states" (VI, 757 C-E).

But to disregard for the moment the difficulty in reconciling the political thought of the dialogues with that of the letter and to go on with the interpretation, Plato taught Dion the theory of political *isonomia* and found in him a pupil "with a keenness and ardour that I have never yet found in any of the youth whom I have met" (327 A).<sup>27</sup> The latter's views are, in fact, those of Plato. This statement proves the point made at the very beginning, that Plato knows about Dion's views from personal experience. And, as if to confirm the other initial assertion—that Dion continued to hold his views unchanged (324 A-B)—Plato adds that Dion "determined to live the rest of his life in a different manner from the majority of the Italians and Sicilians" and in consequence was out of favor with them until the death of Dionysius (327 B).<sup>28</sup>

"After this event," the letter continues, Dion tried to bring Plato back to Sicily. The statement comes as somewhat of a surprise, for nothing has as yet been said which would indicate that Plato had left Syracuse, or if he had, under what circumstances. Plutarch, who calls Dion Plato's best pupil, "as Plato himself had written [327 A] and as events testify" (*Dion*, 4, 2,) supplies what is missing. Dion and Plato tried to convert the elder Dionysius to their views. The attempt was in vain, nay, it roused the tyrant's anger. Later things calmed down, and since Plato was eager to go home, Dion sent him away (5, 2). Whether or not the account of Plutarch is correct in all details is uncertain.<sup>29</sup> But one can hardly imagine that Plato, after having made the acquaintance

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already been published at the time of the first Sicilian voyage (cf. Bluck *ad* 326 A), but there can, of course, be no doubt that it is the central doctrine of this dialogue that is referred to here and made the symbol of Plato's political views.

<sup>27</sup> For further characterizations of Dion, see below, p. 45.

<sup>28</sup> I note that according to Plutarch, Dion continued to have the confidence of Dionysius (*Dion*, 5, 4).

<sup>29</sup> Historians usually accept Plutarch's version (e.g. Grote, *A History of Greece*, XI, pp. 34; 54; Bury, *A History of Greece*, p. 653). Plutarch says that Dionysius tried to have Plato killed or sold into slavery on his trip home (according to Diogenes Laertius, III, 18 f., he succeeded in the latter, cf. in general, Zeller, II, 1<sup>4</sup>, p. 414, note 1-3). Except in 327 B, Dionysius the Elder is mentioned in the letter only in 331 E-32 A (a brief characterization of his reign).

of the young Dion and won his adherence, should not have had contact with Dionysius and tried to interest him in his political ideas.

Has the epistle reasons for being silent about this encounter, and are they perhaps connected with the letter's failure to explain why Plato went to Italy and Sicily? To be sure, it is said of his coming to Syracuse and of his meeting with Dion that they happened "possibly as luck would have it, though it seems likely that one of the Superior Powers was contriving at that time to lay the foundations of the events which have now taken place in regard to Dion and in regard to Syracuse" (326 D-E). But such an assertion, though it is not implausible, really tells nothing about Plato's purpose in coming to Syracuse.

Generally speaking, the biographical tradition, which attests Plato's extensive travels to many countries, among them Sicily, sees their objective as an exchange of ideas with other philosophers, as study and research.<sup>30</sup> Plutarch seems to suggest that Plato went to Sicily in order to realize his political dreams. When he talked to Dionysius and was asked "why he had come to Sicily," he said that he had "come to seek a virtuous man" (*Dion*, 5, 2). It is an answer not improper for the Plato who had learned that the true state could be built only by philosophers and is, thus, in accord with the position ascribed to him in the letter. One can understand that the letter omits any reference to other travels, that it suppresses the motive of research as alien to the statesman Plato. It is harder to account for the fact that his political intentions are not mentioned.<sup>31</sup>)

Whatever the solution to this problem, it must at this point be clear that the letter is not a straightforward historical report written simply for the sake of giving the whole truth. The omissions noted, the reticence concerning essential data one wishes and is entitled to know and about which other sources provide information, suggest that the writer has aims that he does not state direct-

<sup>30</sup>) See Boas, *Philos. Rev.*, 1948, pp. 446 f. (according to Diogenes Laertius, III, 6, Plato went to Italy to see the Pythagoreans). On the travels in general, see Zeller, II, 1<sup>4</sup>, pp. 402 ff. In my context it is immaterial whether or not these travels are historical. I am concerned only with pointing out that the letter disagrees with the traditional account.

<sup>31</sup>) Such a conversation between Dionysius the Elder and Plato is mentioned even in Olympiodorus' *Vita Platonis* (p. 3, 9 ff. [Cobet]); cf. also *Vita Anonymi* (p. 7, 52 f. [Cobet]).

ly.<sup>32</sup>) He could, nevertheless, be Plato. But even then, the tale told cannot be judged simply according to the criterion of accuracy; the interpreter must take into account the tendentiousness of the letter. He must explain why Plato wished to give such an account and how it could be justified. Moreover, it is fair to say that an autobiography which is concerned less with the facts than with a certain view of the facts can readily be imagined to be the work of someone who used the material at his disposal to conjure up Plato as he pictured him.

## 2. THE FIRST JOURNEY TO SICILY AND THE MOTIVES FOR THE SECOND

The autobiography proceeds without any marked transition to Plato's second visit (327 B). And here, in contrast to the statement on the first voyage, his motives are fully detailed (327 B-329 B), while the actual events receive less attention (329 B-330 B).<sup>33</sup> Before setting forth his reasons, however, Plato makes it quite clear that he went only in response to an invitation on the part of Dionysius the Younger, who had been persuaded by Dion to send for him. Also, Dion himself kept urging him to accept the invitation of the young tyrant (327 C-D), as he was most hopeful that "now, if ever," the programme of the *Republic* could be carried out. The latter point is of such importance, it seems, that Plato quotes in full "the terms, long though they are to repeat," in which Dion's request was couched (327 E).<sup>34</sup>

Despite Dion's urging and assurances, Plato was doubtful of the success of the mission he had been asked to undertake. He knew he could rely on Dion, but he was afraid that the others would change their minds (328 B). In the end, he convinced himself that the opportunity offered was indeed unique and must be seized. Thus he set out from home, "dreading self-reproach most of all, lest haply I should seem to myself to be utterly and absolutely no-

<sup>32</sup>) Friedländer (I<sup>2</sup>, p. 6) has noted that the survey given in 324 B-326 B is incomplete. As I have tried to show, this incompleteness extends to the following section.

<sup>33</sup>) 329 B introduces the report of the events with the words "I must not be tedious," which perhaps indicates that the author knows more than he is going to tell.

<sup>34</sup>) Dion's argument that the situation is most favorable for the realization of Plato's ideas of political reform reappears later, below, p. 51.

thing more than a man of mere words (λόγος μόνον) and never to undertake willingly (ἐκὼν) any action" (C); he went also out of regard for his obligations to his friend Dion as well as for those to philosophy, which he had always claimed was maligned "by the rest of mankind" (E) and which he thought might be maligned in this instance were he unwilling to take upon himself the labors and dangers involved in the task (329 A).

Now one will not quarrel with the claim that Plato thought the invitation of Dionysius gave him the best chance ever to found a state in accordance with his political principles. It is also understandable that reasons of friendship and his duty to philosophy (A-B) influenced his decision. One may not even be astonished to read that he feared self-reproach if he remained in Athens, especially if, as the letter has it, he had up to his fortieth year "constantly [been] waiting for an opportune moment" (326 A) and had always been prevented from acting. Yet one wonders how the wish not to be a "man of mere words", not to give the impression of never undertaking any political action "voluntarily"—a wish which, contrary to the assertions of others, inspired him and counted "most" with him (328 C)—how this wish can be reconciled with the *Republic*, certainly published before he went to Sicily for the second time, in 367 B.C.<sup>35</sup>)

In this dialogue, from which the Seventh Letter derives its ideal of the philosopher-king as the savior of mankind (326 B), in this dialogue, whose teaching Plato was to bring to life in Sicily (328 A; cf. 328 C), he emphatically opposes the common Greek opinion that words count less than deeds and maintains that "practical action" (πραχθῆναι) partakes of exact truth less than speech (λέξιν) or theoretical reasoning (V, 473 A).<sup>36</sup> He even goes so far as to say of his heavenly city that "whether it exists now or ever will come into being" is of no importance (IX, 592 B). As for political action, he contends that the virtuous man does not "willingly" (ἐκόντες εἶναι) participate in politics (VII, 519 C; cf. I, 347 C), that the true philosopher engages in it because it is "an unavoidable necessity"

<sup>35</sup>) In his account of Plato's motivation in going to Sicily (*Dion*, 11. 2), Plutarch aptly paraphrases the letter's meaning when he says that Plato, "as he tells us himself," went "out of shame more than anything else, lest men should think him nothing but theory and unwilling to take any action." The second trip—which the letter calls the first (330 B)—is usually dated in 361 (Harward, p. 25).

<sup>36</sup>) On the commonly held view, cf. Shorey, *ad loc.*

that he should do so (VII, 520 C; cf. 540 B; also I, 347 C-D). And it is only the city which has properly educated the philosopher that has the right to force him to give up his studies for the sake of political administration; in any other city it is quite natural that he should be loath to share "the labors there" (VII, 520 B).

It is true, Plato is not merely speculating on political matters, or suggesting improvements regardless of the question of their realization. He does give much attention to the problems of whether or not a government by philosophers could possibly be established, and how it could be established. He even admits that only in the city adapted to his nature can the philosopher "attain his full stature and together with his own, preserve the common weal" (VI, 497 A). One can, therefore, well imagine that he himself would have been prepared to lend a hand in political action when he believed the hour had come. But the Plato of the *Republic* is concerned with reality because the *vita contemplativa* and practical social activity, speculative and practical reason in the Kantian sense of the term, are inseparable, because social activity "issues naturally and inevitably, as a sort of 'by-product,' from . . . aspiration after something else. . .".<sup>37)</sup> To put it differently, theory precedes action; being normative, it stands higher in the scale of values; to speak of the theoretician as a "mere word" is unplatonic. The statement of the epistle goes against both the spirit and the letter of the *Republic*.

And it will not do to say that it gives voice to the usual disparagement of theory or that Plato accommodates himself or makes concessions.<sup>38)</sup> If this were true, he would have adopted the very

<sup>37)</sup> A. E. Taylor, *Plato*, 1936, p. 295. Zeller describes Plato's attitude well: it was difficult for Plato to resign himself to having achieved nothing (p. 419 [*Republic*, VI, 496 C]), and he desired to have political influence (*Republic*, VI, 473 C ff.); he wished not so much to be a statesman himself, as to train statesmen (p. 420), but he would not shrink from action if necessity demanded it (p. 423, note 1, referring to *Republic*, I, 347 C; VII, 519 C ff.). Müller's claim that Plato never envisaged actual reforms has been rejected rightly by B. Stenzel ("Is Plato's Seventh Epistle Spurious?", *A.J.P.*, 74, 1953, p. 394).

<sup>38)</sup> Friedländer stresses the fact that *Republic*, V, 473 A, contradicts the common opinion (III<sup>2</sup>, p. 127), but says of the letter: "Die populäre Überordnung des Handelns über das Wort begegnet bei Plato in Brief VII, 328 C 6" (note 62); cf. also p. 361 (where the statement in question is characterized in the following way: "Gewiss sah er es zuweilen als seine Not an . . ."). Howald (*Die Briefe Platons*, 1923, p. 18) interprets Plato's reluctance to be a mere theoretician (328 C-D; 327 E; cf. 326 B) as a reaction to his *Bildungs-*

attitude against which he had spoken out with vehemence; he would have abandoned a claim that is inseparably connected with his deepest conviction. For it is the recognition of the existence of Ideas, of their predominance over phenomena, which teaches the philosopher that things here and action in this world are subordinated to life "there" (*Republic* VII, 517 C-D). It is he who has once seen the world beyond who must consider the return to earthly affairs, though this may be necessary and in the course of duty, as a return to what matters less.<sup>39)</sup>

Even within the framework of the letter, the outcry against speculation—the passionate wish not to be a "mere word"—is somewhat astonishing. After all, though Plato was at the beginning a man of politics, he did become a philosopher. He learned that political action must be based on insight into the truth. Understanding of the true character of reality is the presupposition of rulership and government.<sup>40)</sup> Although in his early years Plato had always wished for a chance to act as a statesman, he is not merely a philosopher "*faute de mieux*"; the teaching in the Academy is more than teaching by default. The letter's predominant concern with practical action, with the statesman rather than the philosopher Plato, must not obscure the fact that on principle it holds politics to be under the sway of philosophy.<sup>41)</sup>

Later, the letter itself, having stressed again that regard for friendship and philosophy carried much weight in Plato's decision (328 A-329 A), summarizes the account of his reasoning in these words: "Well then, I came for good and just reasons so far as is pos-

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*reise*, during which his main task was the study of Pythagoreanism; he adds that the opportunity for political observation was an allurements to Plato. But this cannot be the view of the letter, which does not mention any travels for the sake of study and assumes that Plato's primary concern was with political activity.

<sup>39)</sup> Even in the *Laws*, on which Plato was working when, presumably, he wrote the letter, he still recalls with apparent satisfaction that "we are concerned at the moment with theory, not with practical execution" (V, 736 B; cf. IX, 857 E-858 A). Whether or not the attitude attributed to Plato in the letter is more consistent with the philosophy ascribed to him there will be discussed later (below, pp. 10 f.).

<sup>40)</sup> The letter makes such understanding itself depend on kinship with philosophy (below, p. 92).

<sup>41)</sup> As Misch rightly says, the main subject of the letter is "die politische Aufgabe des Philosophen" (I, 1, p. 132). Concerning the characterization of Plato's philosophy as secondary to his practical aims, see above, p. 1 and note 2; also Gomperz, *Platons Selbstbiographie*, pp. 39 f.



sible for men to do so; and it was because of such motives that I left my occupations which were by no means ignoble" (τὰς ἐμαυτοῦ διατριβὰς οὐκ ἀσχήμενας [A-B]). To be sure, this admission of the value which the study of philosophy and philosophical teaching have sounds flat when compared with the *Republic's* contention that the life of those who have seen the Idea of the Good is like life on "the Islands of the Blest," where they should like to linger, and where they are happy, but cannot be allowed to dwell forever because it is not their happiness that is at stake (VII, 519 C ff.).<sup>42</sup> Yet, restrained as are the words of the letter, they do acknowledge Plato's concern with *theoria*. Only one objection can be made against the letter's whole characterization of Plato the theoretician. There are as it were two souls in him. Intent on action, he discovers philosophy; living for philosophy, he yearns for action. He is, it seems, "one of those whom Prodicus describes as on the border-ground between philosophers and statesmen" (*Euthydemus*, 305 C), and upon whom the Plato of the dialogues does not look with favor because they "cannot be made to understand the nature of intermediates" (306 A), one of "these philosopher-politicians who aim at both [philosophy and political action and] fall short of both in the attainment of their respective ends, and are really third, although they would like to stand first" (C).<sup>43</sup>

But the letter has introduced the statement mentioning Plato's not ignoble "occupations" not in order to round out the picture of Plato the theoretician, but rather, in order to minimize an inconsistency with which Plato might be charged, namely, that he should have been willing to go to the court of a tyrant, "which ill became, as it seemed, both my teaching and myself" (οὐ πρέπειν τοῖς ἐμοῖς λόγοις καὶ ἐμοί [329 B]). It may seem not altogether surprising to a reader attentive to what has preceded that it should be unbecoming for Plato to consort with a tyrant. For Plato has judged Athenian democracy rather favorably; he has professed his belief

<sup>42</sup> Cf. also the praise of pure contemplation in the *Symposium* and the ironical question of whether a life dedicated to it should be called "a pitiful life" (211 D).

<sup>43</sup> This passage has already been used by J. Socher (*Über Platons Schriften*, 1820, pp. 419 f.) in his interpretation of the letter. I note in passing that the letter never mentions when or why Plato became a teacher, an event that the tradition usually puts after his return from his travels (Zeller, II, 1<sup>4</sup>, pp. 402 ff.). This is another instance of the strange manner in which facts one is entitled to know are suppressed.

in *isonomia*.<sup>44</sup>) But the reader of the Platonic dialogues can, again, not help being surprised, indeed, vexed.

About Plato himself and his character it is perhaps impossible to argue with any degree of certainty from the evidence in his writings. In antiquity, as well as in modern times, "his admirers clothed him with all the idealism that aroused their enthusiasm in his writings"; his detractors accused him "of envy, contentiousness, pride, snobishness, luxury, greed, plagiarism."<sup>45</sup>) But if one thinks of the views he professed, an invitation to come for the sake of instructing Dionysius in the truth of philosophy (327 C-D) and thus helping "to realize our theories concerning laws and government" (328 C) would certainly have been most welcome to Plato. The *Republic* asserts that the true state could most easily come into existence if "either philosophers become kings. . . or those whom we now call our kings and rulers (δυνάσται) take to the pursuit of philosophy" (V, 473 C-D), if "a genuine passion for true philosophy takes hold either of the sons of men now in power and sovereignty (δυναστεύειν ἢ βασιλεύειν) or of themselves" (VI, 499 B). Nothing indicates that those in power could not be tyrants, or that the sons of men now in power could not be the sons of tyrants.<sup>46</sup>) Moreover, in the *Laws*—and this work must have been largely finished when the letter was composed—it is stated openly and unambiguously, shocking though the assertion may be to the listeners (IV, 710 C; 711 A; cf. 711 D-712 A), that no better or more fortunate opportunity can offer itself to the legislator than that he should be called upon to cooperate with a young tyrant (709 E). Has Plato forgotten what he himself wrote? Is he trying to undo his teaching or to change it? Some such answer, it seems must be given if the letter is genuine.<sup>47</sup>)

The matter at issue is not of small importance. Within the letter

<sup>44</sup>) Cf. above, pp. 6 and 13.

<sup>45</sup>) Shorey, *What Plato Said*, p. 52. See also below, p. 50.

<sup>46</sup>) On the terms τυραννίς and δυναστεία see E. R. Dodds, *Plato, Gorgias*, 1959 (*ad* 492 B 3). It is hardly necessary to add that Plato's willingness to work with an autocrat ready to listen to him does not alter his moral judgment on tyranny as pronounced for instance in the *Gorgias*, and reflected in such passages of the epistle as 327 B; 329 D-E; 332 D.

<sup>47</sup>) U. v. Wilamowitz (*Platon* <sup>3</sup>, 1948, p. 434) says of the statement quoted in the text that Plato failed to suppress it (meaning, I suppose, after his disillusioning experience in Sicily). This, if true, would be a testimony to Plato's honesty. But one would still be at a loss to understand how he could have judged it unbecoming to have any dealings with a tyrant.

itself, the explanation of Plato's motives looms large, and it has polemical overtones. The author acknowledges the fact that others have interpreted Plato's intentions differently (328 C; cf. 330 C); he admits that the teaching of his Plato is inconsistent with his action (329 B). But he wishes to justify what he did. As a matter of fact, at the very end of the letter it is said most emphatically: "I deemed it necessary to explain the reasons why I undertook my second journey to Sicily because absurd and irrational stories are being told about it. If, therefore, the account I have now given appears to anyone more rational, and if anyone believes that it supplies sufficient excuses for what took place, then I shall regard that account as both reasonable and sufficient" (352 A). The *apologia pro vita sua*, as one often calls the letter, is not merely a defense; it is a spirited attack on enemies who calumniate Plato's actions and motivations. This being the case, one cannot consider the discrepancy that exists between the dialogues and the letter a trifling matter.<sup>48</sup>) And can one not expect from Plato that his deeds be in accord with his words? Instructing Dion "verbally" in what he believed was best for mankind, he had counselled him "to realize it in action" (327 A). In the dialogues he can bestow no higher praise upon Socrates than that in his "actions" (τῶν ἔργων) he has always lived up to "any kind of words, however freely spoken" (λόγων καλῶν καὶ πάσης παρρησίας) and he adds that, growing old, it is good to learn more and more, "but only from honest folk" (ὑπὸ χρηστῶν μόνον) such as Socrates (*Laches*, 188 E-189 A).<sup>49</sup>)

But to turn to the description of the events of the second voyage, it is, as I have pointed out already, rather brief. The court of the tyrant was rent by strife and slander. After a little while, Dion was charged with conspiracy and banished. His friends, among them Plato, feared for their lives (329 B-C; cf. 333 B). But Diony-

<sup>48</sup>) This should be done least by those who believe the letter to be genuine and who hold, as does Harward, that what Plato says here "is evidently intended for readers at Athens and in the Greek world at large rather than for the friends of Dion at Syracuse" (p. 25). For the epistle as an *apologia pro vita sua*, see e.g. Zeller, II, 1<sup>4</sup>, p. 423, 3; Howald, pp. 29 f.; J. Geffcken, "Antiplatonica," *Hermes*, 64, 1929, p. 89.

<sup>49</sup>) The passage continues: "Let him concede to me that my teacher is himself good—else I shall dislike my lesson and be judged a dunce—but if you say that my teacher is to be a younger man, or one who so far has no reputation or anything of that sort, I care not a jot" (189 A-B). On Socrates see also *Apology*, 32 A.

sus, recognizing that it might harm his reputation if Plato tried to leave, pretended to be his friend and begged him to stay. In fact, he contrived to prevent his return home (D-E). Plato does not deny, however, that he was able to cast a spell on the tyrant, who became more and more devoted to him, but not in the right spirit. For what Dionysius wanted was Plato's praise; he was not interested in his teaching. And though Plato continued to hope that the day would come when he would acquire a desire for the philosophic life, "he with his resistance won the day" (330 B). So in the end Plato "went away" (*ibid.*).

This is the first time that Dionysius is talked about at some length. The picture given is not flattering. He falls prey, seemingly without reason, to those who accused Plato and Dion of wanting him to become a student of philosophy so that they could take over the administration of his realm (329 B; 330 B; cf. 333 A).<sup>50</sup> He behaves as tyrants do, coupling his requests "with compulsory powers" (329 D). Though a report is spread that he is "wonderfully devoted" to Plato (330 A), he remains suspicious of him. And his affection for Plato is explained as due to personal ambition rather than to a real concern for philosophy, despite the fact that later on the letter itself admits that Dionysius, whose education was neglected by his father (332 D) and who, to be sure, has an extraordinary love of glory, also "is naturally gifted otherwise with a capacity for learning" (338 D; cf. 339 E; 328 A). Plato, on the contrary, shows off to advantage. He remains patient, all provocations notwithstanding, and holds fast to his original purpose, which was to convert Dionysius to the truth of philosophy. And he does so even though his fears that the mood of young men is changeable (328 B) were confirmed after barely three months (329 C).<sup>51</sup> It is clearly not his fault that the tyrant fails to become a philosopher-king.

After what happened, one should assume that when Plato finally "went away", as the letter puts it, he parted from the tyrant in enmity. This, however, was not the case. As is told later on, a war broke out and Plato urged Dionysius to let him go, but it was agreed that after peace has been re-established Dion and Plato

<sup>50</sup>) But see below, p. 140.

<sup>51</sup>) This, if I am not mistaken, is the only exact date given in the letter and serves to underline the fact that the friendship between Plato and Dionysius was short-lived, cf. below, p. 141.

would be invited back (338 A). Plato then left in a friendly atmosphere, as is corroborated by the fact that before his departure he effected an alliance between Archytas and the Tarentines and Dionysius (C). Why Plato took such an attitude the letter does not explain. As in the report on the first voyage, so in that on the second, essential data are left out.

There remains an even more perplexing difficulty. The epistle, here and throughout, insists that Plato never instructed Dionysius; this is, in fact, a point it strongly emphasizes.<sup>52)</sup> But no matter how the tyrant behaved, it is not likely that Plato, in all these months, should never have talked to Dionysius about philosophy. He certainly talked to him about politics. For, as the letter—again, later—puts it, Plato and Dion “used to counsel him on how to rule his state” (331 D; cf. 332 C; 333 A; cf. 334 D).<sup>53)</sup> And it is not easy to see how any real counselling could be done without initiating Dionysius into Platonism, since the rulership was to be in the hands of a philosopher-king.

Also, other sources attest that the tyrant took lessons with Plato. According to Plutarch, who integrates great parts of the Seventh Letter into his account, Dionysius was not only “extravagantly eager to hear [Plato’s] doctrines and share in his philosophical pursuits” (16, 2), but used “inaptly what he had imperfectly learned from Plato” (18, 1).<sup>54)</sup> Earlier, Plutarch has spoken of the royal welcome Plato received upon his arrival in Sicily (13, 1). He adds that Plato made an immediate and great impression upon the tyrant. His way of life changed completely. “There was also a general rush for discussions and philosophy, and the palace was filled with dust, as they say, owing to the multitude of geometers there” (2).<sup>55)</sup> Should Dionysius have been the only one not to join the

<sup>52)</sup> Cf. 330 A-B; also 338 E and below, pp. 61; 76.

<sup>53)</sup> In the previous account of Plato’s visit, the counsel is not mentioned. Perhaps it is the author’s preoccupation with Plato’s motives that makes him abbreviate his report of the events; cf. above, p. 22. But the author may also be aware of the fact that if Plato counselled Dionysius, he did in a way teach him—the very thing he is eager to deny.

<sup>54)</sup> Plutarch speaks of τοῖς Πλάτωνος παρακούσμασι. The letter uses the same noun in order to point out that Dionysius is filled with doctrines he has heard (cf. also 340 B; 338 D), but, characteristically enough, does not say that they are Plato’s.

<sup>55)</sup> The opponents of Plato accused him of persuading Dionysius “to seek in Academic philosophy for a mysterious good, and make geometry his guide to happiness” (14, 2). And even at the end of Plato’s stay, after Dion’s

crowd? If so, the suspicion Philistus and his followers had after a short while "that time and familiarity would render Plato's influence almost irresistible" (3), the fact that they tried to arouse Dionysius' suspicions concerning Plato (14, 1-2; cf. 11, 2) would be hard to comprehend. It is not without reason that in all these details even those modern historians who believe the letter to be genuine follow Plutarch, and not "Plato."<sup>56)</sup>

The analysis of the second section of the letter, then, confirms the impression one receives reading the first. Data essential for the understanding of the situation are not given in their proper context. What is told is in conflict with the representation of events found in the biographical tradition.<sup>57)</sup> There are, moreover, even stronger disagreements with the doctrine of the dialogues, and they are the more puzzling since Plato's teaching is here directly referred to. If the epistle is genuine, one must conclude not only that, as seemed clear before, his feelings changed and that the autobiography he writes is stylized and tendentious, but also, and more important, that in his old age, he abandoned views he professed in his works, even in a work he left unfinished at the time of his death. Such conclusions, it is fair to say, put a heavy burden of proof on anyone who wishes to consider the letter Plato's own. The need for an objective criterion by which its genuineness or spuriousness could be established is apparently inescapable.

### 3. THE COUNSEL TO DION'S FOLLOWERS

The letter now turns to what is presumably its main subject, the advice to be given to the followers of Dion, and introduces it with a general rule concerning counselling (330 C-331 D).<sup>58)</sup> As in

banishment, the tyrant "was extravagantly eager to hear [Plato's] doctrines (about which he had first heard from Dion [11, 1]) and to share in his philosophical pursuits" (16, 2).

<sup>56)</sup> See e.g. Harward, p. 22. Aware of the fact that "the only reference in Plato's letters to this course of mathematical teaching" is to be found in *Ep.* III, 319 C 3, he assumes that a reference to it may at one point have been removed from *Ep.* VII. But it is not certain that there is a lacuna after  $\pi\rho\omega\tau\omicron\nu$  (332 D), as Harward suggests (note 45), and if the mathematical teaching had actually been mentioned in the Seventh Letter, one would be confronted with another inconsistency.

<sup>57)</sup> I do not, of course, mean to maintain that the biographical tradition is necessarily more trustworthy, but one wonders how it could have arisen had the genuineness of the letter been generally acknowledged.

<sup>58)</sup> The transition to this section contains a significant remark. After

medicine, so in politics, one should advise only those willing to follow one's counsel and to shape their action accordingly (D-331 A). Plato's own stand has always been in accord with such a view. In private life, he has never counselled anyone except when asked; he has never forced another to listen to him; one may apply force only to slaves. If in the opinion of the philosophical statesman his country is ill-governed, "he ought to speak, if so be that this is not likely to prove fruitless nor to cause his death, but he ought not to apply violence to his fatherland in the form of a political revolution, whenever it is impossible to establish the best kind of polity without banishing or slaughtering citizens, but rather he ought to keep quiet and pray for what is good, both for himself and for his state" (331 D).

Such an attitude toward counselling fits in with what has been said of Dion, namely that he hoped to establish "the blissful and true life" without massacres and murders (327 D; cf. also 333 E ff.; 331 A). It also fits in with Plato's insistence that he was drawn into the Sicilian adventure through the invitations of Dion and Dionysius. And one begins to understand why it cannot be true of the Plato of the letter that he sought on his own account to change the ways of Dionysius the Elder.<sup>59</sup>) One may even say that in a way, Plato the Athenian citizen followed the general principle laid down at the onset of the counsel to be given. Whatever he may have done in private matters, he is not known ever to have pleaded in Athenian assemblies for a change in the constitution in accordance with his own theories—though he hardly needed an invitation to do so—nor did he ever participate in an attempt to overthrow the government. But the matter stands differently if one judges the counsel from the point of view of the Plato of the dialogues. The language, to be sure, recalls the language of the dialogues; its content, however, is in contrast with theirs.<sup>60</sup>)

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mentioning that Plato returned to Sicily a third time and that his motives for doing so and all his actions will be discussed later, the author says that he should come now to the counsel "so as not to give the first place to matters of secondary importance." In other words, he knows that the letter, ostensibly concerned with counselling Dion and his followers, is growing into a defence of Plato.

<sup>59</sup>) It needs no demonstration, I suppose, that Dionysius the elder is not likely to have asked Plato's advice (cf. also below, note 68). For the tradition concerning the first visit, and the invitations extended to Plato, see above, p. 13 ff.

<sup>60</sup>) For the comparison between the doctor's and statesman's advice

To begin with the prohibition of violence, in the two passages in the *Republic* in which he speaks of the moment when the philosopher-statesmen take the state in hand, Plato asserts that they will not do so "before they either have received a clean state or themselves made it clean" (πρὶν ἢ παραλαβεῖν καθαρὰν ἢ αὐτοὶ ποιῆσαι [κ.τὴν πόλιν]), and this, he adds, "would be their first point of difference from ordinary reformers" (VI, 501 A); "all inhabitants above the age of ten. . . they will send into the fields, and they will take over the children. . ." (VII, 541 A).<sup>61</sup> And in order either to have a clean state or to make the state clean it may be necessary to impose death upon the citizens, as follows from Plato's remarks in the *Laws*, where he deals again with "the business of social purification" (τὰ περὶ καθαρμοῦ πόλεως, V, 735 D); "the best method of all, like the most potent medicine, is painful; it is that which effects correction by the combination of justice with vengeance, and carries its vengeance, in the last instance, to the point of death or exile, usually with the result of cleaning society of its most dangerous members, great and incurable offenders" (D-E). To be sure, there is another method, a milder one—to use the euphemistic expression, "a measure of relief," or to use its true name, "colonization" (736 A)—but it is the one to be used only by the legislator who establishes a new society and new laws with less than autocratic power; the first—"the sharpest and best of all—will be at the disposal of one who is at once autocrat and legislator" (735 D).<sup>62</sup>

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(330 D ff.), Bury rightly refers to *Republic* IV, 425, E ff., and also *Laws* VII, 720 A ff.; and for the comparison with the duties of a son, to *Crito* 51 C; *Laws* IV, 717 B ff. For the latter, Karsten quotes *Laws* IX, 881 B; see Adam, *Archiv f. Gesch. d. Philos.*, 1910, p. 42. It is unnecessary to compare Xenophon, *Mem.*, I, 2, 49, as does Wendland (Adam, *ibid.*).

<sup>61</sup>) These statements give an opinion always held by Plato and are not chance remarks, as Shorey (*ad loc.*) holds. But if I understand him rightly, he believes that this passage and similar ones (cf. next note) only appear to lend support to revolutionaries. I see no reason to deny that in Plato's opinion reforms could not be accomplished without at least the temporary use of force (see Ritter, *Platon*, II, p. 653). Morrow's doubts do not seem to be justified. For *Politicus*, 393, quoted by him (p. 141-2), says no more than what Plato would always have said, namely, that the knife to cure political ills must be used only by the political scientist.

<sup>62</sup>) Parallel passages from other dialogues are collected by Shorey, *ad Republic* IV, 426 D; VI, 501 A; VII, 541 A. In *Republic*, V, 473 D it is said that when political power and philosophical intelligence come to rule, "the motley horde of the natures who at present pursue either apart from the other" must be "compulsorily excluded." Incidentally, it is this passage that Shorey (above, note 13) considers the source for the statement of Plato's



How, then, can Plato maintain in the letter that the view he holds (331 A), the view which "it behoves the man of sense to hold" (C), is the rejection of all violent and revolutionary action?

It is not certain either, I think, that he could claim in good conscience that in politics, as in the case of one's father and mother, one must not apply violence, not irritate with vain exhortations, but rather, if reform is impossible without doing harm to others, "keep quiet" (ἡσυχίαν δὲ ἄγοντα) and pray for what is good both for himself and for the state. Undoubtedly, in the *Republic*, when Socrates starts out to show what must be done to make a philosophical government acceptable to the people, he admits that the philosopher living in a city as it is, is like a man living among wild animals. He will, therefore, be content if he himself succeeds both in doing what is right and in staying alive; he will "keep his peace" (remain quiet [ἡσυχίαν ἔχων]) as far as the world is concerned (VI, 496 D). Yet this is said with regret. For, if the philosopher keeps out of worldly affairs, if he is condemned to live in an unregenerated city, he will not reach the goal at which he is aiming (E).<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, Socrates merely concedes that silence is the safer way. Unlike the letter, he does not make a virtue out of prudence. Nor does he ever advocate compromising the truth, or recommend prayers instead of action. Although neither the *Republic* nor the *Laws* is a political manifesto, both are nevertheless calls for action when the moment comes. So are the education and training of future philosopher-kings for the task they are to perform when "some chance" compels them "to take charge of the state whether they wish it or not," or when, "by some divine inspiration a genuine passion for true philosophy takes possession of sons of the men now in power and sovereignty or of themselves" (*Republic* VI, 499 B-C).<sup>64</sup>

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political theory at the very beginning of the letter (326 B). But the author could not have used "perhaps the most famous sentence in Plato," for it advocates violence at the moment of the take-over. He must have in mind, rather, *Republic*, VI, 499 B-C, where the event is made to depend on chance.

<sup>63</sup>) This passage, which, together with *Apology*, 31 E ff. and *Gorgias*, 521-22, Shorey (*ad loc.*) considers to be Plato's apology for not engaging in politics, seems to be an important source of inspiration for the author of the letter (below, note 91).

<sup>64</sup>) It is often said that Plato recommends prayer instead of action in the dialogues (cf. e.g. Novotny *ad* 331 D 4). But most of the passages quoted, such as *Republic* VIII, 352 E; V, 450 D; 456 D, say simply that the ideal outline is not like a prayer, that is, not a mere daydream. Even *Laws* V,

Finally, though it may be sensible in the ill-governed state to speak only "if so be that this speech is not likely to prove fruitless nor to cause his death" (331 D); though it may perhaps be "manly" not to continue advising those "who altogether exceed the bounds of right government and wholly refuse to proceed in its tracks" because they "warn their counsellors to leave the government alone and not disturb it, on pain of death if he does disturb it" (340 E-31 A)—such an attitude is hard to reconcile with the praise the letter itself bestows upon the Socrates who refused to obey the Thirty and "risked the uttermost penalties rather than be a partaker in their unholy deeds" (325 A).<sup>65</sup> Nor does it go with the latter claim that Dion died nobly because "whatsoever suffering a man undergoes when striving after what is noblest both for himself and for his State is always right and noble" (334 E). Also, the advice is incompatible with Platonic morality. For, as the *Laws* puts it when defining the aim of all law-giving, "nobody in any station must show a preference for any kind of thing that thwarts these means of achieving perfection; he must sacrifice even the state, if it appears necessary that it should be overturned, sooner than see it bow to a servile yoke at the bidding of its meaner citizens, or else he must give up the State and become an exile. Any such fate must be suffered by men sooner than they should accept a régime productive of their deterioration" (VI, 770 D-E). And as another passage of the same work has it, "the most precious thing in life is [not] bare preservation" (IV, 707 D), or again, "when a man counts

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736 D, claims no more than that in old established societies, when innovations become necessary, "room is left for little more than pious wishes." It is only in the Seventh Letter and in the eleventh (below, p. 125) that Plato commits himself to prayers in the place of action.

<sup>65</sup>) Some interpreters, however, think that the quietism advocated in the letter agrees with the actions of the Platonic Socrates, and use this agreement as an argument for the genuineness of the letter (e.g. Bluck *ad* 330 E; cf. also E. Wolff, "Platos Apologie", *Neue philol. Unters.* 6, 1929, pp. 32 f.). But although Socrates was warned by his inner voice against taking part in politics, and rightly, as he says—for no one can save his life wherever he may be living if he tries to restrain his fellow citizens from unjust deeds (*Apology* 31 C-E)—he did counsel all Athens to do the good and avoid what is evil. And he did so knowing well that he risked his life (32 A-D); he is not astonished at the death sentence passed by the Athenians. If I am not mistaken, it is only in the *Politicus* that Plato admits "that speaking quite generally, the aim of all actions of men everywhere is to secure for themselves the most tolerable life they can" (302 B). But there, he is speaking of "the natural search of unenlightened humanity for a 'quiet life'" (see Skemp, *ad loc.*).

it good to live at all costs, that also is dishonor to the soul" (V, 727 D; cf. *Republic* VI, 486 A).<sup>66</sup>)

In sum, the preamble to the counsel is neither entirely unplatonic nor entirely faithful to the spirit of Platonic teaching. While in previous sections the letter is wont to omit data, to say less than one is entitled to know, and thus gives a tendentious report, here it indulges in equivocal assertions; it changes the emphasis of Plato's thought to such an extent that the truth becomes an untruth.<sup>67</sup>) To justify the letter one would have to be willing to assume that Plato himself did not embrace the dogma which the dialogues preach or that he changed his mind in his old age. The same difficulty, the same *aporia*, is, I suggest, presented by the counsel itself, which, true to the principle of caution advocated in the letter, was given "not openly," "for it would not have been safe" (332 D).<sup>68</sup>)

This counsel, which is the same Dion and Plato used to give Dionysius (331 D; 332 C), asks first of all that one gain mastery over oneself and win "trustworthy friends and companions" (πιστοὺς φίλους τε καὶ ἑταίρους [331 E]). It was the undoing of the elder Dionysius that he was unable to establish governments by such "companions" (ἑταίρων) in the newly conquered cities. He had no one whom he could trust, and was thus "seven times more unhappy than Darius, who was able to trust others and, through the laws he framed, preserved the Persian empire" (B-332 A). The Athenians also preserved their empire for seventy years because they possessed "friends" in the cities they had conquered (B-C).<sup>69</sup>)

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<sup>66</sup>) The statement made here is based on the belief in the immortality of the soul, the very conviction which according to the letter explains Plato's praise of Dion's death (334 E ff.), and a doctrine of which, among others, Plato tried to persuade Dion (335 C). (The translation of *Laws* VI, 770 D-E is that of England, which, though not different in meaning from that of Taylor, seems to me more adequate.)

<sup>67</sup>) A not uninteresting example of the change in accent is Plato's advice concerning the acquisition of wealth, the care of soul and body (331 B). The three subjects are ranged on the same level. This may be in conformity with the Thirteenth Letter, but even the eighth clearly distinguishes their relative importance (355 B), in agreement with *Laws* III, 697 B; see also *Gorgias*, 477 C (below, p. 150).

<sup>68</sup>) One can hardly say of the Plato of the letter that he "had the courage of his opinions", as Harward writes (p. 18). Incidentally, the attitude described in the text explains more fully why the conversation between Dionysius the Elder and Plato is incompatible with the letter (p. 25 and note 59).

<sup>69</sup>) The importance of such friendship is underlined by the concluding statement that there is "no surer sign of a man's virtue or vice" than whether

Such a proposal is not inconsistent with the framework of the letter. For almost at the very beginning it is stated that when Plato pondered over a possible change in the situation in Athens after the death of Socrates, he thought that "it was impossible to take action without friends (φίλων ἀνδρῶν) and trusted companions (ἐταίρων πιστῶν); and these it was not easy to find ready to hand, since our State was no longer managed according to the principles and institutions of our forefathers (ἐν τοῖς τῶν πατέρων ᾗθεσι καὶ ἐπιτηδεύμασι); while to acquire other new friends with any facility was a thing impossible" (325 D). The Plato of the letter, then, not only recognizes the influence of the Athenian Hetairiae on the politics of the past; he even considers basing his own political career on the formation of an association or club.<sup>70</sup>) As a teacher, too, he leads men to comradeship. As Dion knows, Plato is above all "able to convert young men to what is good and just and thereby to bring them always into a state of mutual friendliness and comradeship" (ἐταίριον [328 D; cf. 327 C-D]). However, the dialogues, at any rate with regard to political action, pass a very different judgment on all comradesries.

In the *Republic*, Adeimantus sees in them the best means "for lying hid" if one wishes to follow the path of injustice (II, 365 D). Philosophical inclinations in a young man are feared by those "who think that they are losing his service and comradeship" (VI, 494 E). In the *Laws*, "clubs" or "factions" are expressly forbidden. He "who seeks to put law in chains and the State under the control of factions (ἐταιρίας) by subjecting them to the domination of persons, and further serves their ends and foment civil strife by [revolutionary] violence, must be counted the deadliest foe of the whole State" (IX, 856 B).<sup>71</sup>) Nor can the Plato of the dialogues judge differently. The divided city to him is the unhappy city. He wishes

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he has such friends (332 C); the younger Dionysius has been deprived of them through bad education (C-D).

<sup>70</sup>) That 325 D refers to the Athenian ἐταιρία has been recognized by Novotny, *ad loc.* On these associations, see G. M. Calhoun, "Athenian Clubs in Politics and Litigations," *Bull. of the Univ. of Texas*, n. 262, 1913 (and the dissertation of the same title, Chicago, 1911); and F. Sartori, *Le eterie nella vita politica Ateniense del VI e V secolo A.D.*, 1957. Perhaps when Socrates is called an associate of Plato's rather than his teacher, he too is seen as a political friend (above, note 11).

<sup>71</sup>) The Platonic passages on the *hetairiai* have been collected by Morrow, p. 141; cf. also Sartori, "Platone e le Eterie," *Historia*, VII, 1958, pp. 157-71. (I owe this reference to H. Cherniss.)

to extinguish all self-seeking. To make all citizens one, to unify their feelings, their thoughts, is his aim.<sup>72)</sup>

For a moment, one might consider the possibility that the companions Plato counsels Dionysius to acquire are perhaps akin to the guardians of the *Republic*. Later, when speaking of Dion's murderers, the letter condemns "men whose friendship [is] not derived from philosophy, but from the ordinary companionship (ἑταιρείας) out of which most friendships spring, and which comes from mutual entertaining and sharing in religious and mystic ceremonies" (333 D-E; cf. 334 B). But though the friends Dionysius is advised to seek certainly must be "in harmony about virtue" (332 D), their friendship does not really stem from philosophy. What binds them together is their common interest, their faithfulness to one another and to their leader. Otherwise, it would be impossible to compare them with the companions of Darius, or the friends of Athens; nor could Dionysius the Elder be blamed for not having sought them out.<sup>73)</sup>

The uncertainty one feels at this point about the "genuineness" of the counsel on account of the discrepancies with the dialogues is not relieved but increased by what the letter has to say later about domestic policy. In the section immediately following the one just analyzed and dealing with the assassination of Dion and its consequences (333 A-336 C), it is added incidentally that Plato has always been of the opinion that no state "should be enslaved to human despots but rather to laws" (334 C); this is the advice which he has always proffered and is proffering now (C-D). Naturally, one assumes that these laws should be "equal laws." Is not Plato an adherent of *isonomia* as well as of *hetairiae*?<sup>74)</sup> But when the matter is again taken up, it is said merely that Dion would have "set the citizens in order by suitable laws of the best kind" (νόμοις προσήκουσί τε καὶ ἀρίστοις [336 A; cf. 324 B and also 351 C]). This

<sup>72)</sup> See e.g. *Republic* V, 462 A-E; and in general, "Platonic Anonymity," *A.J.P.*, 83, 1962, pp. 13 f.

<sup>73)</sup> The commentators (e.g. Novotny *ad* 332 a 5) compare the verdict on Darius with *Laws*, III, 695 C. But here the idea of friendship is not implied and the judgment on Darius and the Persian empire is on the whole unfavorable. Morrow's assumption (p. 142) that the formation of such associations was in fact Plato's programme of practical politics does not resolve the contradiction between the dialogues and the letter, of which he is well aware (above, note 71). On the Sixth Letter and the political program of the Academy in general, see below, pp. 122 ff.

<sup>74)</sup> Cf. above, p. 13.

statement contains no reference to equal laws. And indeed, Plutarch, outlining Dion's policy, makes it quite clear that he opposed equality (37, 3); like a physician, he wished "to subject the city to a strict and temperate regimen" (4; see also 48, 3). He had it in mind "to put a curb upon unmixed democracy in Syracuse, regarding it not as a civil polity, but rather, in the words of Plato, as a bazaar of polities (*Republic* VIII, 557 D); also to establish and set in order a mixture of democracy and royalty, somewhat after the Spartan and Cretan fashion, wherein an aristocracy should preside, and administer the most important affairs" (53, 2). The only concession he made to democracy was that, though he did not approve of it, "he thought it altogether better than a tyranny in lack of a sound and healthy aristocracy" (12, 4). It would be hard to deny that Plutarch's Dion is an even better Platonist than the Dion of the letter and a more likely representation of the Dion of reality.<sup>75)</sup>

The same conflict between the claim of the letter and the data known from the other sources exists, I think, with regard to the foreign policy suggested in the counsel Plato has always given. Both he and Dion tried to persuade Dionysius that if he were to re-people the devastated cities and ally them with himself and with one another, he could double his empire and enslave the Carthaginians (332 E-333 A). Of Dion himself, it is stated later that, had he succeeded, he would next have colonized the whole of Sicily and made it free from the barbarians (336 A). What is the likelihood that such advice was offered to Dionysius, or that Dion harbored such plans?

As for the need for colonization in Sicily, it existed as little during the reign of Dionysius the younger as it had existed at the death of his father. When the elder Dionysius died the country, exhausted as it was by the taxes he had exacted, was not depopulated.<sup>76)</sup> The

<sup>75)</sup> Historians generally judge Dion's policy as does Plutarch; see Bury, pp. 658 f. (modified aristocracy) and Grote, XI, p. 107 (dictatorial power; oligarchical), though Grote believes that he really "had in his mind purposes such as Plato gives him credit for" (p. 109). But see below, p. 36.

<sup>76)</sup> For an estimate of Dionysius, see Bury, pp. 648 ff.; E. Meyer, *Gesch. d. Altertums*, V, 1902, pp. 498 ff.; and Grote, XI, pp. 41 ff. The latter speaks of the Hellenic communities as "half-depopulated" (p. 46), and adds that "on this topic the mournful testimonies already cited from Lysias and Isocrates (p. 27) are born out by the letters of the eye-witness Plato". But neither Lysias (*Orat.* 33 Fr. [*apud* Dionys. Halic., p. 521]), in 384, nor Isocrates (IV [Philippus], 65), around 380, speaks of a depopulation of Sicily, and the Seventh Letter (or the other Platonic letters) could be taken as evidence

young tyrant was not given to war. Sicily remained peaceful and prosperous until Dion's attack. The devastation of the country was the consequence of the constant warfare that followed the assassination of Dion and ended, after Dionysius' return to Syracuse in 346 B.C., with his final expulsion in 344 B.C. It would have been hard to foresee these results in 367, when Plato first came to Sicily, or even in 357, when Dion came back to Sicily, or in 354, when the letter was presumably written.<sup>77</sup>) In actual fact, it was Timoleon of Corinth, the newly chosen leader of the Sicilians, who, immediately after he had conquered Syracuse, in 344 B.C., decided "to write to the Corinthians urging them to send settlers to Syracuse from Greece" (22, 4) since, for lack of population, the market place of Syracuse was overgrown with grass, and the other cities "with almost no exception were full of deer and wild swine" (3—4). The Corinthians responded to the call and invited men from everywhere to go to Sicily (23, 1-3); Syracuse was filled again with people (24, 1); even cities destroyed in the fifth century by the Carthaginians were refounded (35, 2).

As for the Carthaginians, the elder Dionysius had kept them at bay despite the fact that towards the end of his reign his power was not as great as it had once been. At the beginning of the reign of the younger Dionysius, the Carthaginians thought the moment had come to make good their losses, and Dion was willing to fight them (Plutarch, *Dion*, 6, 4). But no hostilities ensued, and a little later, Dion—who according to the letter always advised Dionysius to attack the barbarians—secretly offered to help the Carthaginians "to arrange everything securely" (14, 3), a circumstance that, when it became known to the tyrant, made him openly hostile to Dion. When the latter launched his attack on Dionysius, he left the Carthaginians undisturbed on account of his friendship with them; he even accepted the help of the Carthaginian ruler of Minoa,

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only under the presupposition that they can be shown to be genuine. (For Isocrates' judgment on the strength of Dionysius' realm shortly after the tyrant's death, see VI [Archidamus], 45).

<sup>77</sup>) For Dionysius the Younger, see especially Grote, XI, p. 76 ff.; also Niese s.v. *Dionysios*, *R.E.*, col. 906, 29 ff. According to Wilamowitz (*Platon*, p. 432), Plato means by colonization the re-settlement of the Greek cities Dionysius the Elder had destroyed, bringing their population to Syracuse, though he doubts that Dion was in agreement with Plato's proposal. If this is the policy suggested in the letter, then it has surely been expressed most unclearly.

where he landed (25, 6). <sup>78)</sup> Again, it was Timoleon who, in 339 B.C., defeated the Carthaginians (Plutarch, *Timoleon*, 24, 1; 25 ff.), who, shortly before his expedition to Sicily, had reinforced their troops on the island, "watching their opportunity" (2, 1). Among other motives, fear of the Carthaginians had indeed determined the Syracusans to ask for the help of the Corinthians, and they in response to their bidding had sent Timoleon and the army (7, 1-2). <sup>79)</sup>

In short, it looks as if the author of the epistle were thinking, in both these instances, not of what happened in Plato's time, but of events that occurred much later, after Plato's death. The possibility that this is the case is enhanced, I think, by the difficulties that arise for the interpreter when the letter speaks "good words" for the omen's sake for the third time about the counsel it has to give (336 C). One of course expects that the advice proffered (-337 E) will be substantially the same Plato and Dion have given to Dionysius, the same counsel and the same doctrine that have three times been commended to the followers of Dion (334 C). At the very beginning it was emphasized that Plato would come to the assistance of Dion's associates only if they held the opinion which was always Dion's (324 A), and it is the insistence on the continuation of Dion and Plato's original policy, of their first plan of governing through friendship, that provides the excuse for the long discussion of Plato's first meeting with Dion. Nevertheless, the "good words" introduce new stipulations.

First, "those who have won the mastery" are asked to cease from all feuds, assaults and executions and lay down impartial laws (νόμους κοινούς), satisfying to themselves and to the vanquished, to compel their subjects to obey the laws by means of "Reverence and Fear", and to subject themselves to the laws with even greater readiness (E-337 B). <sup>80)</sup> Second, the laws are to be framed by men

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<sup>78)</sup> Plutarch's testimony on Dion's attitude toward the Carthaginians is accepted as true e.g. by Niese *s.v.* Dion, *R.E.*, col. 836, 2 ff.; 838, 17 ff.; also Wilamowitz, *Platon*, p. 436. It is interesting to note that according to Epistle VIII, 357 A, Dion was willing to allow the barbarians who had been settled in Sicily to stay on if they assisted him in his fight against Dionysius. Grote calls this an exception to his policy (cf. Morrow, p. 153). It seems rather its confirmation, or an invention that is nearer to reality.

<sup>79)</sup> Concerning Timoleon, see in general, Grote, XI, pp. 122 ff.; Bury, pp. 660 ff.; for his policy with regard to the repopulation of the country, Grote, pp. 151-3. For the war of Dion and the material destruction it brought, see Bury, pp. 652-58.

<sup>80)</sup> The preceding admonition to virtue is in accord with what has been



selected from the population—fifty from each city of ten thousand citizens—who are to take an oath that “they will give no advantage either to conquerors or conquered, but equal rights in common to the whole city” (τὸ δὲ ἴσον καὶ κοινὸν πάσῃ τῇ πόλει [337 C]). Even then, success still requires that “the victors prove themselves subservient to the laws more than the vanquished” (-D). Only if “these present injunctions” are observed, should Plato or anyone else be asked for help. “For this course of action is closely akin (ἀδελφά) to that which Dion and I together, in our plans for the welfare of Sicily, attempted to carry out, although it is but the second best (δεύτερα μὲν); for the first was that which we first attempted to carry out with the aid of Dionysius himself” (D-E).

Now, although “these present injunctions” are said to be closely akin to those first laid down, they do in certain respects differ essentially from them. One will not object to the fact that the necessity for obedience to the laws is here dealt with at length for the first time. For Plato and Dion surely cannot ever have advocated disobedience to the constitution. And if they pleaded for *isonomia*, as they should have done in accordance with the political philosophy of the letter, equality of the leaders and the led in their observance of the laws seems as self-evident as the protection of the vanquished.<sup>81</sup> It is, however, certainly a new proposal that the laws are to be framed by citizens selected from the community. Of Darius, whose government was compared to that envisaged by Plato and Dion, it has been said that he, himself, framed the laws by which he preserved the empire of the Persians even until this day (332 B). Such a procedure is natural enough in a state that is under the control of a ruler surrounded by friends and companions, and not unlike the one suggested for the philosopher-king of the *Republic* (VI, 501 A).<sup>82</sup>

The procedure now proposed is by no means unplatonic, and since Dion the Platonist should have shared Plato's views, it is also in the

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said before against the “Sicilian life” (above, p. 12, and 332 E [sober minded]), the matter is here phrased in the form of a recall to the ancestral Dorian customs.

<sup>81</sup> In fact, in 334 B-D the letter has already asked for enslavement to law rather than to a tyrant. (On the topic of obedience, see *Laws*, VI, 762 D-E.)

<sup>82</sup> The evidence for the participation of the Academy in setting up governments is scanty (see Friedländer, I<sup>2</sup>, pp. 108 f., and above, note 73). Even if it can be relied upon, it does not tell anything about the procedure of framing laws or constitutions.

spirit of Dion. The *Laws*, the dialogue which deals with the second best state has lawgivers selected from the populace take the place of the philosopher-king in drawing up the several laws. In the same dialogue, "Reverence and Fear" before the laws, which the letter seems to oppose to "Fear and Force"—the "adamantine bonds" with which the elder Dionysius at his death said he left the monarchy fastened (Plutarch, *Dion*, 7, 3; 10, 3)—are made the cornerstone of the constitution.<sup>83</sup>) The only disagreement with the *Laws*, though surely a most important one, is that while the letter unequivocally asks for *isonomia* (cf. 336 D, 337 A; C), the dialogue, as I have stated before, does not charge the lawgivers of the second best state with writing "equal laws" alone. They must preserve the principle of inequality as well.<sup>84</sup>)

But why is it that Plato changes his advice and introduces a new condition for his help, thus going against the condition expressed at the very outset? The epistle implies that the new proposal is made under the impress of the present moment, that Plato is bowing to the exigencies of the situation, though some of the results of the stipulation, it is stated, "may come about later" (336 D-E; cf. 330 C).<sup>85</sup>) This explanation would not be out of character, at least for the empiricist Plato of the letter. But it is not, I think, the true explanation. Earlier stipulations of Plato's advice, in no way justified by the conditions which he and Dion faced in 367—namely, the demands to re-people Sicily and drive out the Carthaginians—show that the author of the epistle tries to connect Plato's political scheme with the policy of Timoleon.<sup>86</sup>) He does the

<sup>83</sup>) Cf. *Laws*, VI, 752 D ff.; 765 D. Harward (*ad* 337 C 1) thinks that the sentence ἀριθμὸν . . . τοιοῦτοι is an interpolation by a later hand. This may well be the case, though the text no longer presents grammatical difficulties if, following Egermann (*loc. cit.*), one takes πεντήκοντα ἱκανοὶ τοιοῦτοι as parenthetical.

<sup>84</sup>) Cf. above, pp. 12 f. Harward (*ad* 337 d 6) takes the second scheme to refer to the new constitution which Dion was planning at the end of his career (Plutarch, *Dion*, 53). But this surely is impossible since the new constitution was to be aristocratic, while that envisaged here is one of "equal laws," and it was for his aristocratic constitution that Dion wanted the assistance of the Corinthians.

<sup>85</sup>) That this is the meaning of the words has been shown by Harward, *ad loc.*

<sup>86</sup>) The demand for resettlement is repeated in this section of the letter (336 D) with the slight, though perhaps not altogether insignificant, addition that people be called "to aid you in re-peopling all Sicily and giving it equal laws, calling them both from Sicily itself and from the whole of the Peloponnesus, not fearing even Athens itself . . ." Cf. below, p. 63.

same in this instance. For that great statesman and soldier, an admirer of Epaminondas and himself a representative of the ideal of the virtuous Panhellene (Plutarch, *Timoleon*, 36, 1), not only fought the Carthaginians and colonized Sicily; most of all, Timoleon was celebrated because he restored the democratic government (37, 1-2; cf. Diodorus, XVI, 70). In the eloquent words of the decree read at his burial, "he overthrew the tyrants, subdued the barbarians, re-peopled the largest of the devastated cities, and then restored their laws to the Greeks of Sicily" (39, 3). And the latter feat he accomplished with the help of lawgivers who had come from Corinth (24, 3).<sup>87)</sup>

Great as is the resemblance of Plato's counsel on foreign and domestic policy to that of Timoleon, the Platonist Plutarch, who wrote the biography of Dion—using material from the Seventh Letter—as well as the biography of Timoleon, seems not to be aware of it. He never says or implies that Timoleon carried out the programme of Plato. Nor does he even mention in his *Life of Dion* that the latter or Plato ever had such plans as the epistle attributes to them, although in the same work he does remember that Plato, in his Fourth Letter, makes an "almost prophetic" statement about Dion's fate (8, 3; 52, 4).<sup>88)</sup> Among modern historians, Grote alone seems to have been struck by the similarity between Plato's thoughts and Timoleon's deeds. Believing in the genuineness of the Platonic letters, he comments: "That for which Plato sighed in the epistles of his old age—commending it after Dion's death to the surviving partisans of Dion, as having been the unexecuted purpose of their departed leader—the renewal of freedom and Hellenism throughout the island—was now made a reality under the auspices of Timoleon."<sup>89)</sup> Such providential agreement between his policy and Plato's prophecy—apparently unknown either to Timoleon or to his biographer—seems not to be very likely.

The epistle's representation of the Platonic plan for the salvation of Sicily is rather, I think, a *vaticinium ex eventu*. It makes Plato wish for what actually came to pass in the course of history. His life and his intentions are re-interpreted in the light of what

<sup>87)</sup> For the fame of Timoleon as a democratic leader, see e.g. Grote, XI, pp. 166 ff.

<sup>88)</sup> For other instances of the freedom with which Plutarch treats the data given in the Seventh Letter, see below, note 98; 108.

<sup>89)</sup> Grote, XI, p. 169.

happened after his death. Such a hypothesis would account for the historical improbability of Plato's counsel.<sup>90</sup>) It would also explain the deviations from the teachings of the dialogues. The Plato of the letter had to be a believer in *isonomia*. Moreover, if he is made to oppose all violence, contrary to the evidence furnished in his writings, it may be well to recall that it was one of the glories of Timoleon that he showed "justice and gentleness in his dealings with the Greeks and his friends"; that he "set up most of the trophies of his contests without causing his fellow citizens either tears or mourning" (37, 4), that he was, of all the great men of the period who wrought great things, the one whose accomplishments were not tarnished by evil deeds (36, 1).<sup>91</sup>)

Before committing oneself fully to the hypothesis suggested, to the belief that the letter could hardly have been written earlier than the end of Timoleon's career—in 336 B.C., approximately twelve years after Plato died—it will be necessary to conclude the interpretation of the whole historical narrative, to see how the other details of the story fit the assumption that the author of the epistle is someone other than Plato. But I venture to maintain that the "second best counsel" and certain features integrated into the first

<sup>90</sup>) Müller maintains that an anti-Carthaginian policy and its implied Panhellenism is foreign to Plato's thought (*Arch. f. Philos.*, 1949, p. 274), for he considers *Republic*, V, 464 C-471 C, to be a later interpolation, which it surely cannot be (cf. B. Stenzel, "Is Plato's seventh Epistle spurious?", *A.J.P.*, 74, 1953, p. 395). Rather, this passage and the *Menexenus*, which I believe to be spurious, as does Müller, will have seemed to the author of the letter to justify his invention of another *vaticinium ex eventu*.

<sup>91</sup>) For Plato's endorsement of strong, even violent, measures, see above, p. 26. One may wonder why the author, if he wanted Plato to be the protagonist of Timoleon's democracy, bothered to attribute to him another political principle, that of *hetairiai*, and thus introduced inconsistencies and created difficulties for himself. But it would surely have been too startling had he attributed to the author of the *Republic* and the friend and advisor of the young Dion only the concept of *isonomia* (first sandwiched in, as it were, in a most inobtrusive manner shortly after Plato presents the programme of the *Republic* [326 D]). The combination of the two fundamentally irreconcilable principles is perhaps his contribution to the problem of Plato's political philosophy, which is usually seen as either democratic or oligarchic (below, p. 64). The fiction of political associations could be derived from *Republic*, VI, 496 C-D—the passage so much in the mind of the writer (above, note 63)—where the withdrawal of the philosopher from politics is explained in part by the fact "that there is no ally (ἑταῖρος) with whose aid the champion of justice could escape destruction." It seems, in addition, to be one of the Pythagorizing features of the letter. In the author's time, the Pythagoreans had become political leaders, though they were not such for Plato (below, p. 68).

counsel provide a first crucial test for the genuineness of the letter. For here, objective historical data—not any subjective evaluation of Plato's character or the interpretation of his philosophy—seem to force the interpreter to assume the spuriousness of the document. While evidence of this sort is merely a stumbling block to those who uphold the genuineness of the letter, it should, if corroborated and enlarged, facilitate the task of proving that Plato and the author of the letter cannot be one and the same person, and in the end make possible a decision of the issue at stake.

#### 4. PLATO'S RELATION TO DION AND TO DIONYSIUS; THE PORTRAYAL OF PLATO

Having set forth the counsel of Plato and Dion, the letter continues with the historical account. The sequence in which the events are narrated is strange. So far, only the first and second Sicilian trips have been described. One expects the description of the third trip to follow now. Instead, the letter turns to events that happened after Plato's return from that voyage (333 B-36 C), namely, Dion's attack on Dionysius—which is euphemistically called “an admonition by deed” (333 B)—its unhappy outcome, and Dion's death.<sup>92</sup> What happened in between Dion's expulsion from Sicily and the beginning of the war is told much later on, when the section on the third trip is introduced (337 E ff.) and in the section concluding the whole letter (345 C-350 E). Badly arranged as it is, the story sets forth clearly the personalities and motives of those involved, and this is the aspect I shall stress in my interpretation, which roughly follows the actual course of events.<sup>93</sup>

When Plato left Sicily in 367 B.C., he and Dionysius, as I have mentioned already, agreed that the tyrant would invite Dion and Plato back (338 A). The call came in 360 B.C. Although Dionysius failed to ask Dion to return, the latter urged Plato to accept the

<sup>92</sup> It is quite correct to say, as does Bury (*ad loc.*), that the term “deed” is chosen, as opposed to “word”. Negotiations between Dion and Dionysius had been carried on for a long time, and the contrast *ἔργον-λόγος* occurs elsewhere in the letter (324 A; 327 A). One must not, however, overlook the fact that the expression—taken probably from *Republic*, VI, 492 D—also tends to gloss over the true character of the undertaking; see Misch, p. 135, and below, pp. 45 f.

<sup>93</sup> The strange arrangement of the narrative may, of course, be characteristic of Plato's “*Altersstil*”; it may, however, be due to the wish to hide difficulties by obscuring the situation (below, pp. 40 ff.

invitation (B). But Plato was doubtful, as he had been in 367 B.C., despite rumors that Dionysius was "once more marvelously enamoured of philosophy," and at first politely refused, giving as an excuse his old age (C). Then the demands that he should come were redoubled, as Plato suspects, for reasons not too honorable. In conversations with Archytas, Dionysius had had to admit that he never took lessons with Plato; so he insisted on Plato's coming partly out of a desire "to hear my doctrine more explicitly," but partly out of "love of glory" (D-E). <sup>94</sup>) Finally, he sent a boat to fetch him and a long letter promising to do for Dion everything Plato wanted him to do if the invitation should be accepted; otherwise, he would do nothing for his friend (339 A-C). Archytas, too, wrote, "eulogizing the philosophy of Dionysius" and pointing out that unless Plato came, the friendship between Dionysius and the Pythagoreans would be dissolved. Moreover, while the Sicilians and Italians "were pulling him in," the Athenians were "literally pushing him out" (D). Under these circumstances, Plato considered it his duty (μὴ δεῖν—δεῖν) not to betray his friends, as well as to find out for certain whether Dionysius was serious in his profession of "love of wisdom" (E). <sup>95</sup>)

The main object of this short narrative is apparently to show that Plato was dubious about Dionysius and his real willingness to become a philosopher, that he was again drawn almost against his own will into the venture of taking on the tyrant's education. His second interference in the affairs of Sicily, like the first, was not a matter of his volition. But the passage has another aim, I think. Everything, to be sure, came about "naturally and reasonably" (337 E). Plato feels "bound to tell the truth and to put up with it should anyone, after hearing what took place, come to despise, after all, my philosophy and consider that the tyrant showed intelligence" (339 A). <sup>96</sup>) If the tyrant knew how to put Plato into a situation in which as an honorable man he could not act differently

<sup>94</sup>) The accusation of love of glory is made three times in D-E (see also 344 E [the philosophical digression]), but preceded by the admission that Dionysius is "otherwise naturally gifted with a capacity for learning" (D). Clearly, facts that cannot be interpreted away are here somewhat surreptitiously slipped in.

<sup>95</sup>) There follows the philosophical digression, for the interpretation of which see below, pp. 70 ff.

<sup>96</sup>) These words too hint at the author's awareness that in other sources Dionysius is acknowledged to be a man of good sense and even of philosophical interests (above, note 94).

from the way he did, Plato knew that Dionysius was a cunning schemer, that his interest in philosophy was fundamentally a pretence. He saw through him. In other words, the account reveals, in addition, Dionysius' true character. <sup>97)</sup>

In doing this, however, the letter gives a far less favorable picture of Dionysius than does Plutarch who, in his sketch of Plato's reasons for going to Sicily for the third time, leans heavily on the Seventh Epistle. Plutarch speaks not of his love of glory, but of his yearning for philosophy, his self-reproach for not having made enough of Plato's earlier presence, and of his desire to have him back, which, to be sure, he carried out with impetuosity, as tyrants do (*Dion*, 18, 2). Moreover, while the letter gives the impression that Dionysius is quite arbitrary in not keeping his word with regard to Dion (338 B), that it is an unreasonable threat for him to make help to Dion dependent on Plato's coming (339 C), this is not so according to Plutarch. Plato had "kept Dion with him in the Academy, where he turned his attention to philosophy" (*Dion*, 17, 1); he had encouraged him to gain the goodwill of the Athenians (2), and through visits to other cities Dion made a great impression on people throughout Greece, even on the Spartans, who were then allied with Dionysius (3-4). And "as time went on, Dionysius became jealous of Dion and afraid of his popularity among the Greeks. He therefore stopped sending him his revenues and handed his estate over to his own private stewards" (18, 1). This puts Dionysius' action—and perhaps also that of Plato—in a very different light. <sup>98)</sup>

The epistle's hostility toward Dionysius pervades also the account of what happened during the third visit itself (345 C-350 B). While Plato was in Sicily, Dionysius broke all the promises he had made him. Twice, the promises concerned the money belonging to Dion (345 C-347 E). The first time Dionysius went back on his agreement, Plato—admitting that he had but himself to blame and those who forced him "to come the third time to the straits of Scylla there yet again to traverse the length of deadly Charybdis" (Homer,

<sup>97)</sup> Cf. below, p. 75. The test which according to the philosophical digression was given to Dionysius will give additional proof of his pretentiousness (below, pp. 72 ff.).

<sup>98)</sup> Here, as before, Plutarch's version of the course of events clarifies the situation and brings out points omitted by the letter; it also shows that a devoted Platonist who knew other sources judged the course of events and the characters involved in them differently. This is not without importance for the history of the attestation of the letters; see below, pp. 57 f.

*Odyss.*, XII, 428)—answered the insult by declaring that he wished to leave (345 D-E). The tyrant tried to persuade him to stay on, “as he thought it would not be to his own credit that I should hurry away in person to convey such tidings” (E). When he did not succeed, he promised to provide passage for Plato. The next day, he changed his mind and proposed to keep the agreement with Dion “on condition that he does not conspire against me” (346 B); he did “not altogether trust him to act justly toward him if he had the use of these funds” (C).<sup>99</sup> Plato was “annoyed” by the proposal and deliberated upon it anxiously. Finally, he acceded to Dionysius’ wishes, but asked him to join with him in writing a letter to Dion, for he was not “Dion’s master” (347 B-C). The letter was apparently sent. But Dionysius, without waiting for an answer, sold the whole of Dion’s property (D-E). Again he had broken his word. Though Plato was completely disillusioned by what happened, he kept his feelings to himself: while it was his wish only to return to Athens, and while Dionysius “was scheming how he might shoo me back without paying away any of Dion’s money, nevertheless, to the whole of Sicily we appeared to be comrades” (348 A). The third broken agreement concerned the leader of the mercenaries, whose pay Dionysius had reduced and who on that account revolted against him (348 A-349 C). Told in a dramatic way, the incident illustrates most clearly the tyrannical temper of Dionysius, who denies today the promises he made yesterday (349 A).<sup>100</sup>

Again, Plutarch recounts the events in a way less detrimental to Dionysius. He is aware of the fact that “Plato himself did not at first reveal the tyrant’s perfidy and falsehood but bore with it and dissembled his resentment” (*Dion*, 19, 3). When Plato introduced the subject of Dion “there were postponements at first on the

<sup>99</sup>) Dionysius’ action, then, was not as irrational as it first seemed; he thought he had reasons for suspecting Dion (and Plutarch makes clear what they are and that they go back to the time before Plato’s arrival [pp. 33; 44]). And later on, the letter itself admits that Dionysius believed that the accusations made against Plato and Dion were true (p. 44). (In 349 E it is added that Dionysius “supposed I bore him no good will because of the clean sweep he was making of Dion’s moneys.”)

<sup>100</sup>) The story has Plato overhear a conversation in the garden (348 C). Such a detail gives a ring of authenticity to the account. But even data of this kind could have been gathered from the sources available to the author. The discrepancies between the account given of the incident in the Seventh Letter and that given in the third (cf. below, p. 140) are a good example of the freedom with which ancient epistolography treats the most personal experiences of its heroes.



part of Dionysius, and afterwards fault-findings and disagreements" (*ibid.*). This statement still puts the blame on Dionysius, but it leaves room for misunderstandings. And of the third broken agreement he says nothing.<sup>101</sup>) Whoever may have been the authorities Plutarch follows, their representation of the events throws into relief the bias of the letter. While the tradition makes allowances for Dionysius, the epistle finds as much fault with him as possible.

Only in one instance do the letter and Plutarch reverse their positions vis à vis Dionysius. According to the letter, Plato, having left the palace after his quarrel with Dionysius, was residing among the mercenaries and happened to learn that he had been slanderously spoken of amongst the peltasts and that some were threatening to kill him (350 A).<sup>102</sup>) He then informed Archytas and his other friends of the danger in which he found himself and they came under the pretext of an embassy of State and begged Dionysius to let Plato part as he desired to do. The tyrant agreed and provided Plato with supplies for his journey. According to Plutarch, on the other hand, Dionysius removed Plato from his lodgings in the palace garden and put him in charge of his mercenaries "who had long hated the philosopher and sought to kill him, on the ground that he was trying to persuade Dionysius to renounce the tyranny and live without a bodyguard" (*Dion*, 19, 5). In this perilous situation, Plato's Pythagorean friends interfered and asked his release from Dionysius since Plato had taken them for sureties of his safety (20, 1). Dionysius sought "to disprove his enmity to Plato by giving banquets in his honor and making kind provisions for his journey" (*ibid.*). Before Plato left, the tyrant went so far as to say: "I suppose Plato, thou wilt bring many dire accusations against me to the ears of your fellow philosophers." Whereupon Plato answered with a smile: "Heaven forbid that there should be such a dearth of topics for discussion in the Academy that anyone mention thee" (2).

Plutarch ends his report with the words: "Such they say was the send-off of Plato, Plato's own words [in the letter] do not entirely agree with this account" (*ibid.*). This curt dismissal of the

<sup>101</sup>) Instead, Plutarch relates that Aristippus jestingly foretold that Plato and Dionysius would soon become enemies (19, 4).

<sup>102</sup>) Plato had at first lodged in the garden of the palace from which, as the letter says, it was almost impossible to escape (347 A). Then, under a pretext, Dionysius sent him to stay with his friend Archdemus (349 D). How he came to reside with the mercenaries is not explained (but see below, p. 48).

discrepancies between the two versions obscures its importance.<sup>103)</sup> For, as Plutarch represents it, Dionysius obviously hopes that Plato will be killed by the mercenaries. His plan is thwarted by the Pythagoreans and he covers his tracks by a show of friendliness. The epistle takes another view. Dionysius saved Plato's life. As it says at the beginning of the section on the third voyage, "I ought to give thanks, after God, to Dionysius, seeing that, when many had planned to destroy me, he prevented them and paid some regard to reverence in his dealings with me" (340 A). It is consonant with this claim that the letter leaves unexplained how Plato came to live among the mercenaries. But it goes without saying that it is strange that after all that has been said against Dionysius, he should now be praised as the savior of Plato's life.

Why the epistle in other respects denigrates Dionysius hardly needs explanation. The greater his faults, the more justified the actions of Plato and his friends. Later on, when mentioning Plato's departure from Sicily again, the letter implicitly acknowledges that it has distorted the facts. For it admits that Dionysius probably believed that Plato, "as many slanderers asserted, was conspiring with [Dion] against himself and his throne" (350 C; cf. 329 C; 333 A). Reasons for suspecting Dion, and therefore Plato, had perhaps existed ever since Dion had tried to persuade the older Dionysius to disinherit his son in favor of another heir (Plutarch, *Dion*, 6, 2).<sup>104)</sup> At any rate, the letter concedes that Dionysius' behavior was not as irrational and vile as was claimed before. He may not have been able to live up to the hopes that were set upon him. He was not, however, the person the letter makes him out to be.

The same disregard for historical accuracy is, I think, noticeable in the continuation of the historical narrative which, first of all, develops the role Dion played in the events that took place after Plato's return from Sicily to Greece. Plato met with Dion (350 B-E), and the latter asked that Plato and his friends help him to take ven-

<sup>103)</sup> That Plutarch himself accepts the tradition of unknown origin does not, of course, establish its historicity. It seems to fit the account Aristoxenus gave of Plato's voyage (below, note 142). Incidentally, Harward says of the section 345 C-350 E that it "calls for few comments" (note 121). I have tried to show that this is not the case.

<sup>104)</sup> The report of Plutarch is accepted as historical e.g. by Niese, *R.E.*, col. 835, 41 ff.; it is the more trustworthy since the biography is in general written with a bias in favor of Dion and glorifies him as a philosopher and pupil of Plato (846, 42-44).

geance on Dionysius. Plato, though bidding him to "summon my friends to his aid should they be willing," himself refused to participate in the planned venture. Having been forced by his friends to associate with Dionysius, he was now bound to the tyrant by the law of hospitality and indebted to him for his life; he was also too old "to assist anyone in war" (C-D). <sup>105</sup>) Dion, supported by his friends in the Academy, undertook the attack on Dionysius, and failed. If Plato had been listened to, if his earlier attempts at reconciliation had not been rejected, the evil outcome might have been avoided (D-E).

What impresses one first in this brief statement is the representation of Dion and his relation to Plato. The same Plato who had told Dionysius that he was not "Dion's master" (347 C) now claims that had the tyrant acted otherwise, everything would have turned out well, "for both my will and my power were such that I could have easily restrained Dion" (E). Not only is this a contradiction as regards Plato's influence on Dion; that it might be necessary to restrain his follower would never have occurred to Plato had Dion been "resolved to suffer rather than to do unholy deeds, although guarding himself against so suffering" (351 C), or, as he was called earlier, a man "who purposed to practice justice" (335 C), who was "just and courageous and temperate and most wisdom-loving" (336 B). Clearly, the writer knows of certain weaknesses in Dion's character and tries to gloss them over; he is aware of what Plutarch calls Dion's haughtiness (52, 4; cf. 8, 3), which was his despite the self-mastery he had learned in the Academy (42, 2), and the modesty of his personal life (51, 2). The letter is partisan, not to say disingenuous, in its delineation of Dion as well as of Dionysius, and no doubt for the same reason. Dion's moral constancy and integrity make the arbitrariness of the tyrant more blatant and objectionable. <sup>106</sup>)

A second point in the narrative is equally significant. The author ventures the opinion that the war could have been avoided "if Dionysius had paid over the money or had even become wholly reconciled to [Dion]" (350 E). That money is seen as the cause of warfare could well reflect statements of the *Republic* to the effect that wealth and poverty corrupt men's souls (IV, 421 D ff.), that

<sup>105</sup>) It is added that this was said "because I loathed my Sicilian wandering and its ill-success"; see below, pp. 52 f.

<sup>106</sup>) Cf. above, pp. 41 f.

in the ideal city of Platonic communism "we can count on their being free from the dissensions that arise among men from the possession of property, children, and kin" (V, 464 E). However, such an explanation would hardly do justice to history, and more specifically to the historical data preserved in other sources: the long standing suspicions of Dionysius, the preparations of Dion made for his fight with the tyrant, Dion's vexation at Plato's failure to gain influence over Dionysius, his hostility, which came to the fore "when he heard how his wife had been treated by the tyrant" (*Dion*, 21, 1), and his final response to the call that he come "to free Sicily, which stretched out her arms to him and eagerly awaited his coming" (22, 1), a demand transmitted to him by none other than Speusippus, who with other members of the Academy did cooperate with Dion in the war itself. And no less an authority than Aristotle says that Dionysius was "attacked by Dion in a spirit of contempt: he says that he was despised even by his own subjects, and was always drunk" (*Politics*, V, 10, 1312 a 5 ff.).<sup>107</sup>

Before going on to a discussion of the representation of Plato himself, it may be well to underline the distrust with which ancient historians treat the account of the Seventh Letter, as is evidenced by what has just been said about the divergence between the Seventh Epistle and the historical tradition concerning Dion and Dionysius. Of course, one would not expect all writers to agree with Plato in every detail. But it is astounding that those ancient historians who quote the letter as Plato's contradict him in his main points.<sup>108</sup> And it is fair to add that on the whole modern historians who uphold the genuineness of the letter likewise represent Dionysius as did Plutarch, whose picture is indeed more convincing. They also judge Dion as do ancient historians—differently from the letter, which, as it detracts from Dionysius' character, elevates that of Dion. They do not grant that he is without guilt, that he does every-

<sup>107</sup> Concerning Aristotle's judgment, see also 1568 b 20 (Fr. 546) and below, p. 49. Plutarch mentions Eudemus and Timonides and a seer, Miltas (22, 3), as companions of Dion's; cf. Grote, XI, p. 75. (Speusippus was Dion's most intimate friend in Athens [Plutarch, 17, 11]).

<sup>108</sup> Cf. above, notes 88; 98. Plutarch makes no mention of the transactions regarding the money due to Dion, with which the letter is greatly concerned. It goes without saying that the parting words he attributes to Plato do not fit the Plato of the letter, who speaks to a tyrant in "veiled language"; cf. above, p. 29.

thing for the best of motives, that he is in no way responsible for Dionysius' actions. <sup>109</sup>)

Now as for Plato, the verdict on the causes of the war already indicates partisanship. For it is also maintained that "by their disobedience and their refusal to heed my attempts at reconciliation [they] have themselves to blame for all the evils which have now happened" (350 D). And indeed, throughout the narrative it is shown how Plato tried to settle the financial issues between Dion and Dionysius. Proposals concerning the matter had been included in Dionysius' second invitation to Plato (339 C); their first and second dissensions were over Dion's money (345 C ff.). <sup>110</sup>) It is concern for the restitution of Dion's property that determines Plato to stay on even when he feels he should leave (346 C-347 E). In other words, he has done everything possible to prevent the war. His patience and his efforts at reconciliation last until his life is endangered and he is forced to leave Sicily (349 C-D). While these statements serve a purpose in their own context, they are not consistent with the historical evidence, which pays hardly any attention to these money matters. Plutarch merely mentions that Dionysius kept sending Dion the revenues from his property after he had banished him (16, 3), that he stopped sending them only when Dion became more and more popular among the Greeks (18, 1), and that Dionysius offered Plato money which he refused (19, 2). He omits any reference to transactions with Plato regarding the money due to Dion. It would seem, then, that the letter exaggerates what is incidental in order to paint a more favorable picture of Plato. He, too, is without blame. He has gone to the greatest trouble even with regard to the sordid causes of the war. <sup>111</sup>)

But the letter not only plays up Plato's part in the events unfairly; it seems to go out of its way to present data in such a way that they can be used to excuse him. As I have mentioned before,

<sup>109</sup>) On Dion, see e.g. Bury, *op. cit.*, pp. 655 ff.; Meyer, *op. cit.*, V, pp. 501 f.; 505 ff., and now, K. Berve, "Dion", *Abhandlungen Akademie d. Wissenschaften u. d. Literatur*, Mainz, NR. 10, 1956.

<sup>110</sup>) The discussion of the incident (above, pp. 41 f.) is very long and detailed. Plato's concern with the matter is indicated also by his saying that if he refused to accept Dionysius' proposal and left Italy, Dionysius might make this same offer to Dion anyway and claim that Plato had taken no interest in his friend's affairs (346 E).

<sup>111</sup>) For Plutarch's account, cf. above, p. 41; for the reason why Plato is so concerned with his probity in matters of money, below, p. 64.

when Plato returned from Sicily, he permitted Dion to enlist the help of his friends in the Academy, but refused to assist him in his war against Dionysius (350 B-C). It is not a decision easy to justify. Was Dion not his most faithful, his best pupil (327 A-B)? <sup>112</sup> Is it not true that at any rate according to the letter Dionysius was wrong and Dion right? Did it not matter to Plato who was in the right and who in the wrong? The author of the letter apparently feels the difficulty of making Plato's attitude understandable. And so he has him explain his decision by the fact that he is a friend of Dionysius as well as of Dion, that Dionysius had saved his life, that he is "no longer. . . of an age to assist anyone in war", and finally, adds: "This I said because I loathed my Sicilian wandering and its ill-success" (350 D). This assemblage of reasons hardly makes the case more convincing. If any of the reasons given carries weight, it is Plato's indebtedness to Dionysius for his life. It is the most implausible reason, and also the one Plutarch omits when speaking about Plato's refusal to participate in the war; he refers only to his age and his respect for duties incurred by the hospitality of Dionysius (22, 1). <sup>113</sup>

That Plato's reaction to the events is represented by the letter in an extremely biased manner is corroborated by the very last section of the historical narrative, which deals with the outcome of the war that began in 357 B.C., three years after Plato's return from his last visit to Sicily (333 A-336 C). Dion had almost immediate success, but he did not gain the confidence of his compatriots. He was slandered, as he had been in 367 when he tried to persuade Dionysius to become a pupil of Plato's, and in the end he was assassinated (333 B-C). <sup>114</sup>

<sup>112</sup> As Grote says, "Plato . . . gave his approbation, yet not without mournful reserves"; he was "lukewarm" in his feelings towards Dion (XI, p. 75).

<sup>113</sup> Cf. above, pp. 43; 44, for the difficulties the story causes within the framework of the letter. As Misch points out (p. 154), it is surely not compatible with the picture given of the tyrant Dionysius that he should save Plato's life. For the concept of ill-luck, see below, pp. 58 ff.

<sup>114</sup> The report is introduced in the form of a parenthesis. Harward (note 50) finds this in keeping with Plato's digressional style. But I am not aware of a parallel case in Plato's writings, where a subject "quite outside the story," as Harward says himself, is brought in with equal abruptness. After a sentence that deals with events of 367, the letter turns to events of 357 with the prefatory remark: "Then—to cut a long story short—Dion came from the Peloponnesus" (333 B). Harward's defense of Burnet's text (ἐκπεράνωμεν κτλ.) is, as he himself indicates in note 47, open to doubt. The τὰ before ἐν ὀλίγῳ must be bracketed, as it is by Hermann. How the calumnies arose that led

The deed was done by two of Dion's friends, Athenians by birth. As Plato knows, the blame for their crime was laid upon Athens (334 B). He counters the accusation by pointing to the fact that he, too, is an Athenian but stood by Dion when he was in the bad grace of Dionysius (333 C-D).<sup>115</sup> The assassination, to be sure, cannot be excused; but "the two murderers are not important enough to cast a reproach upon our city, as though they had ever yet shown themselves men of mark" (334 C). Having thus rejected the recriminations on Athens, Plato turns to praising Dion who died "nobly", while "Dionysius is living now no noble life" (E).<sup>116</sup>

It would be hard to guess from the account given that the Academy must have been blamed, and rightly so, for the crime perpetrated even more than Athens was. For the two men, whose names Plato does not deign to mention—Callippus and Philostratus—were themselves members of the Academy, or at least Platonists, notwithstanding the letter's flat statement that the friendship of those who betrayed Dion "was not derived from philosophy, but from...ordinary companionship" (333 E-334 A). Moreover, Aristotle, when discussing the frame of mind in which men attempt to do wrong and the objects of their wrongdoing, includes in his long enumeration "those against whom we have a complaint, or with whom we have had a previous difference, as Callippus acted in the matter of Dion, for in such cases it seems almost an act of justice" (*Rhetoric*, I, 12, 29; 1373 a 19). Some people who were close to the Academy, then, felt that Dion was culpable and actually defended Callippus who, in their eyes, was not a vile criminal.<sup>117</sup> Why the Plato of the letter judges as he does is evident. He sides with Dion and is opposed to all violence. But considering the actual facts, one must say that the epistle is not overly concerned with presenting a straightforward account of the events. In order to exculpate Plato and the Academy, which supported Dion's enterprise

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to Dion's death is implied in 334 A by the statement that Dion was accused of having come not to liberate the Syracusans, but to make himself their ruler; see 334 A; cf. also Plutarch, *Dion*, e.g. 34, 1.

<sup>115</sup>) It is not clear on which of the visits Plato refused to approve of Dion's expulsion despite all the blandishments offered by Dionysius.

<sup>116</sup>) For this praise, see above, p. 28. The wish to denigrate Dionysius is so overriding that even here he is contrasted unfavorably with Dion.

<sup>117</sup>) Cf. e.g. Wilamowitz, p. 436; Harward, p. 48. Incidentally, the letter claims that the murderers were not friends on the basis of an "association in liberal education" (διδάδὲ ἑλευθέρας παιδείας κοινωνίαν [334 B]; cf. also 345 C). The term is, I think, unplatonic; cf. below, p. 163.

with Plato's approval, it answers the questions that could be raised by denying that there are questions to be answered.<sup>118)</sup>

It would be rash to say on this account that Plato himself could not have written the letter. Even great men have sometimes been unwilling to face unpleasant facts and have defended themselves against accusations by brushing them aside. They have also shown partisanship in judging their friends and enemies as does the Plato of the letter with regard to Dion and Dionysius. Whether or not the historical Plato was such a man, it is hard to say. As I have admitted, his character is shrouded in mystery, and the tradition concerning his personality as well as his life and actions is, from early times on, either openly hostile or openly laudatory.<sup>119)</sup> Yet, no one, I think, has ever given a picture of him that is identical with the one given in the Seventh Letter. His other followers have certainly represented him as more forthright in his dealings with the younger Dionysius, as well as the elder, more critical of Dion, and more objective in his evaluation of Dionysius.<sup>120)</sup> And such an attitude on the part of Plato is more in agreement with the impression of his personality which the reader of the Platonic dialogues will derive from them, even though Plato never mentions himself. For this mental image, which one cannot fail to form, includes—to use a happy phrase—"moral tact, a sustained spiritual tone and its presumptive implications."<sup>121)</sup> It does not include the wish to dissemble, lack of the courage to state one's convictions, a twilight of truth and falsehood, or fault-finding with others and excessive admiration for oneself, qualities that would be characteristic of Plato if he had written the letter.

The matter stands quite differently if the letter is not Plato's, but written by a devotee, who wishes to defend his hero and can-

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<sup>118)</sup> Harward, who says that Plato "cannot bring himself to mention the name of Kallippos" (p. 47; *ad* 333 e 1, another explanation is given), adds that "Plato is careful to state that he and his brother, who acted with him, were not philosophers." But since Harward admits (cf. above, note 117) that Kallippos was closely connected with the Academy, it seems to me that the words "Plato is careful to state" should read "Plato covers up the truth." On the Aristotle passage, see Niese, col. 845, 18-20.

<sup>119)</sup> Cf. J. Geffcken, "Antiplatonika," *Hermes*, 64, 1928, pp. 87 ff.

<sup>120)</sup> As for antiquity, this is shown by the tradition Plutarch follows (pp. 13; 43), and of modern writers, neither Wilamowitz (*Platon*, pp. 423 ff.; especially 429 f.; 432, 435), Friedländer nor Taylor (*Plato*, p. 71) is willing to accept every detail of the representation of Plato's character given in the epistle.

<sup>121)</sup> Shorey, *What Plato Said*, p. 53.



not believe that he is ever at fault. What is an untruth in Plato's mouth is then the view of events and persons taken by another, who answers criticism and objections in the light of what he believes to be the truth. The foregoing analysis provides grounds enough to assume that the Seventh Letter is not authentic. That its author is a worshipper of Plato and reveres him above all men can easily be shown. For the manner in which the Plato of the letter speaks of himself betrays the pupil; it does not befit the Master.

Perhaps not too much should be made of the fact that the author is willing to have Dion say to Plato, "you above all, as I know, are able to convert young men to what is good and just and thereby to bring them always into a state of mutual friendliness and comradeship" (328 D-E, cf. 327 D). Self-praise is not foreign to men of genius, and the ancients were never as disdainful of it as the moderns claim to be.<sup>122</sup>) But it would surely require a petty conceit that goes beyond the natural awareness of one's accomplishments to assert that if Dionysius deems one's doctrine worthless, "he will be in conflict with many witnesses who maintain the opposite, men who should be vastly more competent judges of such matters than Dionysius" (345 B). One cannot judge differently the rhetorical question: if Dionysius had acknowledged the value of Plato's theories "for the liberal education of the soul"—whether he found them himself or learned them from Plato—"would he have treated the leader and the outstanding authority on this subject with such ready disrespect?" (εὐχερῶς ἠτίμασεν [345 C]). Nor can one believe that Plato himself would have recounted all the instances in which Dionysius broke the promises he had made to him under the heading "how he showed his disrespect" (πῶς δ' ἠτίμασεν). Thus the disciple speaks about the revered head of the school, as would the author of the letter, who thought that Plato, the guiding master in philosophy, had been taught by no one, not even by Socrates.<sup>123</sup>)

<sup>122</sup>) See Aristotle's portrait of the Great-Souled Man (*Nicomachean Ethics* IV, 1123 b 34 ff.). One will also have to allow for the fact that the letter pretends to be an autobiography, and that self-praise is a fixed topos in this literary genre (Misch, *op. cit.*, I, p. 172). And after all, the Plato of the letter does know that personal injuries are small as compared with the injury of philosophy (335 E).

<sup>123</sup>) Novotny *ad* 345 c 2, has shown, on the basis of Platonic parallels, that the word [τὸν] ἡγεμόνα [τούτων] means as much as teacher, and κύριον as much as custodian of philosophy; contrary to Müller, then, these terms do not designate "a spiritual Führer" (cf. B. Stenzel, *A.J.P.*, 1953, p. 393). Still, they do evidence an overbearing arrogance, as Müller contends (*Arch. f.*

One last point in the representation of Plato remains to be considered. It is his final verdict on the Sicilian adventure and its outcome. "I have the best of rights," he is made to write, "to be angry with the men who slew [Dion], very much as I have to be angry also with Dionysius, for both they and he have done the greatest of injuries both to me and, one may say, to all the rest of mankind" (335 C). If Dionysius had listened to Plato, philosophy and power would have come together in the same person, and "the radiance thereof would have shone through the whole world of Greeks and barbarians" (336 D). People would have learned that the virtuous alone should rule. Dionysius made this impossible, and compared to this injury, "the rest of the injuries he did I would count but small" (E). The murderers of Dion, on the other hand, have unawares brought about the same result as Dionysius. Dion would have governed Syracuse according to the best laws. And again, had a man of true virtue once obtained rulership, "the most of men would have formed the same opinion of virtue which would have prevailed, one may say, throughout the world if Dionysius had been persuaded by me, and which would have saved all" (336 B). This reaction to the disappointment of Plato's hopes is hardly exaggerated. Granted that he was "a dreamer dreaming greatly," his vision was still not unrealistic; his philosophical scheme could have been put into practice, it could have changed the course of human affairs. When the plan foundered, there was, as the letter states, reason for sadness and bitterness.<sup>124)</sup>

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*Gesch. d. Philos.*, 1949, p. 266, note 32). Harward tries to defend Plato's using "this strong phrase of himself" (note 120). But even if Aristippus thought that Plato himself was sometimes presumptuous in conversation (Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, II, 12, 1398 b 29 [cf. Zeller, II, 1<sup>4</sup>, p. 428]), it is hard to imagine that he could have been that presumptuous in a public letter, especially considering the fact that in all his writings he never takes credit for any of the philosophical theories he proposes.

<sup>124)</sup> That the letter speaks of Plato's sadness and bitterness suffers no doubt (e.g. Wilamowitz, *Platon*, p. 423). Whether the disappointment was so great that he changed his political views (e.g. Barker, *op. cit.*, p. 294), or whether he never abandoned his original political theory, or modified it only slightly (e.g. Wilamowitz, p. 520) is another problem (below, p. 68). At any rate, he who believes in the genuineness of the Seventh Letter can hardly claim that Plato did not experience the tragic ruin of his plans. The passages referred to in the text do not lose in force because Plato was from the beginning uncertain of how much he could accomplish (contrary to Friedländer, I<sup>2</sup>, p. 110, with reference to 328 B and 340 A). That Plato's political theory, though normative, is meant to be a guide to political action I have argued above, p. 17.

One who has seen his cherished expectations come to naught will also ponder over the reasons for the catastrophe. All would have been saved, Plato says, had not the "onset of some deity or some avenging spirit by means of lawlessness and godlessness, and above all, by the rash acts of ignorance" wrecked and ruined everything (336 B). Chance, "mightier than men," scattered to the winds Dion and his plans (337 D). And he sums up his feelings in the phrase that he was unwilling to participate in Dion's war "because I loathed my Sicilian wandering and its ill-success" (ἀτυχίαν [350 D]). Again, it seems not unnatural that he who has been thwarted in all his endeavors should come to attribute his downfall to "some chance mightier than man." Such a confession is not cowardly, not lacking in grandeur, when the stakes at issue are high, when one has done all one could do, and yet is defeated. One may well call it heroic or deeply pathetic. Even statesmen and soldiers who for years have stubbornly pursued their aims, led on by a firm belief in their own strength, their own will and insight, have in the end confessed: "Destiny was merciless towards me when it threw me into the most difficult whirlwinds. I wanted much, I began much, but the whirlwind, the world whirlwind carried me and my work away."<sup>125</sup>

But is this a confession in the spirit of Plato? The dialogues undoubtedly acknowledge the influence and might of Fortune. The *Republic* expresses the hope that one day, through heaven's assistance, kings may become philosophers, or philosophers kings. The *Laws*, perhaps even more often, invokes the blessings of the Divine; it speaks of men as "the playthings of the Gods" (I, 644 D).<sup>126</sup>

<sup>125</sup>) These are the words of Draja Mikhailovich, the opponent of Tito. (I quote them from a review of *Full Circle: The Memoirs of Anthony Eden*, by C. L. Sulzberger, in the February 28, 1960, *New York Times Book Review*, where they are applied to Eden himself.) The author, having spoken of Plato's ill-luck, goes on to a reflection on Dion's death, which also emphasizes the inevitable course of fate—though the word itself is not used—and which seems almost Platonic even to Shorey and Misch despite their doubts concerning the genuineness of the letter. Both scholars compare the passage with Plato's epigram on Dion (6 [Diehl]); see Shorey, *What Plato Said*, pp. 44 f.; Misch, I, 1, pp. 136 f. But while the epigram attributes Dion's death to the δαίμονες, the letter—rather prosaically—compares his fall to "the calamity of a good pilot" (351 D). Moreover, the author of the letter seems to reject the claim of the epigram that Dion was Plato's love (below, p. 65).

<sup>126</sup>) For fortune in the *Republic*, see above, note 62. As regards the *Laws*,

And yet, it is the *Laws*, the latest of the Platonic works, which unambiguously rejects the view that man is at the mercy of forces other than himself. It condemns the philosophy of history according to which "man never legislates, but accidents of all sort legislate for us in all sorts of ways," as well as the philosophy according to which "God governs all things and chance and opportunity cooperate with him in the government of human affairs." Instead, it adopts a third stand: in addition to chance and opportunity and God, there is operating in human affairs the force of "art" (τέχνη), that is, reason. If man does not use his judgment, "the opportune moment which chance or God provides passes unnoticed or remains unused, even if prayed for, and a storm cannot be weathered" (*Laws*, IV, 709 A ff.). Moreover, Platonism is "eternal optimism" as well as "temporal pessimism". The ideal can never be fully realized; men can only try to do the best under the existing circumstances, never giving up hope that one day better things will come to pass. If one fails, he must remember that "all living creatures, like the world as a whole, are chattels of the gods" (X, 902 B), that he is but a fragment, that all his striving is directed toward the whole, which is not made for him, but he for it (903 C).<sup>127</sup>

It is, then, not in the nature of Platonism to allow man to "loath his ill-fortune," to forget about his own share in the fate that befalls him. If the failure of the hopes Plato had for the Sicilian enterprise shook him to such an extent that in his own life he acknowledged the overruling power of Fate, then he violated the spirit of his own teaching. It would be hazardous to deny that this could have been the case. The claim that one cannot simply identify the philosopher

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see I, 642 C; IX, 879 B; also V, 737 B; 739 E (X, 888 E; 89 B-C concerns natural phenomena); and in general, Zeller, II, 1\*, pp. 594 f.; 977, note 2.

<sup>127</sup>) Interpreters give the impression that "emphasis on the part played by divine power in human affairs is characteristic of Plato in his old age" (Bluck *ad* 324 B; see also Boas, who compares 326 E [τις τῶν κρείττονων] with *Politicus*, 291 D ff.; 302 B ff.; *Euthydemus*, 291 A, and notes that the phrase in question came to be considered Platonic [*Philos. Rev.*, 1948, p. 454]). I have no wish to deny that Plato tends to think in teleological terms. But the passages I have quoted (especially *Laws*, IV, 708 E ff.) put it beyond doubt that he does stress the responsibility of the individual, which the letter minimizes, to the extent that only once does Plato get angry at himself (345 D), and only once does he ask Dion and Dionysius to blame themselves rather than Fate (350 D-E). On the concept of responsibility (*Republic*, X, 617 E ff.) see Stenzel, *Plato der Erzieher*, pp. 183 f.; on *Laws*, IV, 708 E ff., see G. Rohr, *Platons Stellung zur Geschichte*, 1932, pp. 52 ff.; 105. Concerning the divine fate through which men acquire knowledge, see below, pp. 92 f.

with his system, that "men's private conduct and speech often present a humiliating contrast with their public profession," cannot be met on principle.<sup>128</sup>) However, having found the letter wanting in historical fidelity so many times, one may well ask whether the Plato "loathing his ill-fortune" is not an imagined one.

That human life is at the mercy of fate was, of course, a very common Greek feeling. At almost any time an interpreter might have said of Plato that he too was not exempt from the law which holds sway over men. Toward the end of the fourth century, Demetrius of Phaleron, a Peripatetic, wrote a book, *On Fortune*, that set forth the vicissitudes to which it subjects the high and the low (Fr. 79-81 [Wehrli]). Yet, one need not take refuge in such generalities. It is again Timoleon who seems to have been the model for the Plato of the letter, though this time, the two are related by contrast rather than by similarity, as in the instance of Plato's political programme.<sup>129</sup>)

For of Timoleon, Plutarch says that his "good fortune" had something marvelous about it (16, 1); people saw in him a man who had come "under divine guidance" to save Syracuse (6). Some of his successes seemed "wholly due to good fortune" (19, 1). The good will of the gods towards him was no less to be admired in his reverses than in his successes (30, 5). And though to men of just and careful reasoning his leadership would appear to be a product not of fortune but of fortunate valor, "all his successes were ascribed by him to fortune, for in his letters to his friends at home and in his public addresses to the Syracusans he often said he was thankful to God, who, desiring to save Sicily, gave him the name and title of its savior" (36, 3). Moreover, "in his house he built a shrine for sacrifice to *Automatia*, or Chance, and the house itself he consecrated to man's sacred genius" (-4).<sup>130</sup>)

The general contrast between Plato, the step-child of Fortune, and Timoleon, her favorite, between the tragic hero destroyed by Fate and the man of God elevated by Providence, is striking. Moreover, even in details the statesman Plato is the pendant to the general, Timoleon; his failure is, again and again, credited to the

<sup>128</sup>) I have borrowed the phrasing of the argument from Shorey (*What Plato Said*, p. 54), but he is willing to defend the presumption that Plato's own character could not have presented a flagrant contradiction to his ideal.

<sup>129</sup>) Cf. above, p. 37.

<sup>130</sup>) On Timoleon and his belief in the protection of Fate, see Grote, XI, especially p. 171.

same power that made Timoleon succeed. If Timoleon came to Syracuse under Divine guidance, Plato came to Sicily for the first time by "some luck" (κατὰ τύχην [326 C]) and "the help of one of the superior powers (τινὲς τῶν κρείττονων [E]). In associating with Dion, he "was not aware that [he] was, in a way, unwittingly contriving the future overthrow of the tyranny" (327 A). And just as Timoleon, from the outset of his political career (3, 2), is under the guidance of fate, so Plato, at the very beginning of his career, is deterred from his intention to enter politics by "certain chance events" (324 C). Even Socrates' death is due to "some fortune" or "ill-luck" (325 B). To put it differently, the explanation of events by ill-fortune is a leit-motif of the letter—unplatonic, to be sure, yet well in accord with the other changes in the picture of Plato which are determined by the wish to liken him to Timoleon in word and deed.<sup>131</sup>)

It stands to reason, then, that it is not Plato who repents of the Sicilian affair and its outcome. Someone else speaks for him, someone who sees him from a distance, an interpreter by no means insensitive or ignorant, but an interpreter nevertheless, who, in one or another instance, may hit the mark, and then again, misses it completely. The suspicions that were aroused early in the analysis of the historical content of the letter have turned into certainty, I think. At this point one can say that one is forced to give up the initial belief that the account is genuine. It cannot be the work of Plato.

## 5. THE MOTIVES FOR THE WRITING OF THE LETTER

If the historical representation is spurious, one naturally wishes to know when it was forged and what are the motives as well as the

<sup>131</sup>) I have omitted from my enumeration of passages, 326 A-B, where the concepts of τύχη and θεῖα μοῖρα recall the phrasing of the *Republic* (cf. above, note 62); also 324 B and 327 C (where it is said that Hipparinus and Dionysius might with divine help become philosophers, which recalls *Laws*, IV, 711 D). But I could have added 324 C (τύχαι τινές; above, note 4) and 327 E, where Dion writes to Plato that the present opportunity is due to "a stroke of divine good fortune." Harward, commenting on 326 E 2, says that "it was natural to find here the working of a higher power." But he has overlooked the fact that the concept of Fate is not mentioned incidentally, but is an intrinsic part of the letter's philosophy of history. And it is only this unplatonic philosophy which could, I think, account for the unplatonic explanation of Socrates' death as a chance event (above, p. 10), a death which the *Phaedo* attributes to tragic fate (115 A).

background of the forgery. But before trying to answer these questions, it will be well to counter the suspicion that the letter, if invented, is necessarily a product of bad faith and probably of inferior quality. This is by no means true. In antiquity the fictitious letter is a recognized literary device of interpretation. Such letters, like the speeches which historians such as Thucydides weave into their narratives, do not presume to represent a careful inquiry into the actual circumstances. They give, rather, the author's picture of what might have been the case, or what ought to have been the case. Even when they start from fact, they serve to set forth his view of a man or an event. In composing his account, it need not be the writer's design to deceive others by affixing a great name to his "fabrication." Nor was the public always deceived. Not everyone thought that the letters exchanged between Hippocrates and Democritus were written by these two great men.<sup>132)</sup> In part, the history of the attestation of the Seventh Letter too can, I think, be understood only on the assumption that the ancients did not take the document at face value. At any rate, even outspoken champions of the Seventh Letter have followed other authorities when they saw fit to do so, "begging for both," to use a phrase of Plato's (*Sophist*, 249 D).<sup>133)</sup> On the other hand, such letters were often written by men of talent. The letters of Heraclitus, though perhaps unworthy of him, are the work of a reader familiar with his thought, who skillfully shows its relevance to a later generation. The author of the Seventh Letter too is a man of intelligence. He has in addition felicitous artistic judgment. For it was a happy

<sup>132)</sup> On ancient epistolography, see *R.E. Supplement V, s.v. Epistolographie*, cols. 208, 25 ff.; on the reaction of the public, col. 210, 12 ff. I should add that all private letters supposedly preserved from the fifth and fourth centuries are with very few exceptions, later falsifications.

<sup>133)</sup> As is clear from Plutarch's use of the letter (cf. notes 88, 98, 108, 120)—the only writer who refers to the letter often enough to allow one to study the problem at issue. Morrow (pp. 41 ff.) suggests that the discrepancies between Plutarch and the epistles can, with one exception, "be explained as a result of carelessness or oversight" on the part of Plutarch, who quotes them from memory, and not as "a deliberate rejection of the authority of the letters" (p. 43). The instances I have pointed out seem to me to make such a judgment unlikely. In other words, Plutarch and other ancient writers who quote the letter as Plato's have reservations concerning its reliability, just as do modern historians (above, note 56; 120). On the other hand, the letter may contain valuable information even though it is not Plato's, as Karsten is careful to note (cf. below, p. 62). Jowett's complete rejection of the letters as a source of information (*apud* Harward, p. 74) seems to go too far.

thought to put his interpretation into the form of a letter. In later literary theory at least, a letter is a half-dialogue. As such, it seems an especially appropriate medium of expression for the master of the dialogue, whom the author of the letter recalls by inserting direct speech into the document (328 D-329 A; 346 A, E; 348 C; 349 A-B).<sup>134)</sup>

The thesis proposed might give rise to another suspicion. If the Seventh Letter is spurious—and if one disregards the other letters whose genuineness is doubtful too—the evidence for Plato's voyages to Sicily seems rather late and scanty. The authors speaking about his grand tour are relatively late; the three journeys mentioned in the Seventh Letter are related by Diogenes Laertius only "in a compact passage which would seem to have the authority of Favorinus."<sup>135)</sup> It might therefore be argued that the author of the letter, as he "invented" its main content, also "invented" Plato's interference in the policy of Dion, that in actuality Plato never went to the court of Dionysius with the intention of converting the tyrant. Since in the dialogues Plato allows himself the poetic license of playing with historical data and personal circumstance, it would be poetic justice had the author of the Seventh Letter spun his story out of thin air. As often happens, justice probably failed

<sup>134)</sup> For the letter's inclusion of direct speech, see Harward, p. 201; for the letter as a half-dialogue, see *R.E.*, Suppl. V col. 192, 39 ff. That the Seventh Letter is autobiographical certainly shows the influence of Isocrates, cf. Misch, I, 1, pp. 158 ff. (Harward assumes that Plato influenced Isocrates [p. 197]. But the latter quite definitely states that he invented the autobiographical genre, and his contention was never doubted in antiquity.) The author probably thought of his work as a rival piece to Isocrates' *apologia pro vita sua*, which appeared in 353 B.C., that is, shortly after Dion's death, the time in which the forger must have wished the reader to place the letter. Thus his hero checkmates his great opponent—a perfect literary *jeu d'esprit*.

<sup>135)</sup> Boas, p. 453. This is so at least under the assumption that Aristotle, *Physics*, II, 8, 199 b 20 (Boas, p. 446, note 11), is not a reference to the ransom of Plato by Anniceris on his return from his first trip, as Diels and Ross think it probably is (see the latter's commentary, *ad loc.* and Socher, *Über Platons Schriften*, 1820, p. 383). The story is not told in the Seventh Letter (cf. above, p. 13, note 29) and seems to me to be an invention of much later date (see now U. Kahrstedt, "Platons Verkauf in die Sklaverei," *Würzburger Jahrbücher*, 2, 1947, pp. 295-300). Aristotle's statement is quite general and vague and was explained by ancient commentators as a reference to either a play or to Plato's voyage (see Cornford, *ad loc.*, who like Ross rejects the identification with Menander's Μισούμενος made by Simplicius). Molon, who speaks about Plato in Sicily (Diogenes Laertius, III, 34), is hardly a contemporary of Plato (contrary to Bluck, p. 81; also Karsten, 230 and note 2), and must be dated in the first century B.C. (*R.E.*, col. 144, 1 ff. s.v. Apollonius).



to be done. One can hardly doubt that the Academy had a share in Dion's enterprise. That Speusippus supported him as strongly as he did makes Plato's interest in Dion almost a certainty. Dionysius appears as a friend of Plato's as early as in Aristoxenus' writings (Fr. 32 [Wehrli]); he tells of the philosopher's meeting the tyrant at his court, and in a manner by no means hostile to Plato (Fr. 62).<sup>136)</sup> Nor would it have made much sense for the author to invent an enterprise of Plato's and then to invent also accusations of others in connection with it, only in order to defend Plato against them (328 C; 329 A-B; 330 C; 337 E; 352 A). In short, Plato most certainly did not remain aloof from the events that took place in Sicily; most likely he had a hand in them, whether or not he travelled there twice, or three times, or only once.<sup>137)</sup>

Now to turn to the more specific problems that arise, one naturally asks first when the epistle, being spurious, might have been composed. Undoubtedly, it is true "that the desire to exhibit Plato, the great political theorist, actually at work on the attempt to construct a state after his own heart could at any time have been a sufficient motive for the fabrication."<sup>138)</sup> But it is also true that the document can hardly be a rhetorical exercise, as one used to assume in the nineteenth century. It is a passionate defense of Plato written by one who is deeply concerned with the issues at stake. This alone points to the fact that the author cannot be far removed from the time in which the events he describes took place.<sup>139)</sup>

<sup>136)</sup> That Aristoxenus does not know of the letter, however, I have pointed out, above, Introduction, note 4.

<sup>137)</sup> Cf. Zeller, II, 1<sup>4</sup>, p. 423, note 3. In the nineteenth century, the first trip was considered historical, while the two others, which seemed to have no purpose, were not (see Burckhardt, *Griech. Kulturgesch.*, I, p. 287, note 1; for the voyage in general, pp. 362 ff.). Yet, I think one can understand that Plato felt obliged to accept Dion's invitation in 367, even in a less sceptical spirit than the letter ascribes to him (perhaps only in order to show that he foresaw the unhappy outcome of his political enterprise). It is harder to believe, despite all the explanations the letter gives, that he went a third time. The letter itself poses a problem by speaking of the last two trips as the first and second, as if the first trip need not be counted (352 A, 330 C; 337 E). Though this does not prove that one of the trips is an invention, it perhaps indicates that the author is embellishing the story and rounding it out.

<sup>138)</sup> A. E. Taylor, *The Mind of Plato*, 1960, p. 6. (The book was first published in 1908.)

<sup>139)</sup> Karsten spoke of the letter as "*opus . . . otiosi hominis vel rhetoris φιλοπλάτωνος*" (p. 241). This verdict of the most outspoken nineteenth century critic of the letter hardly does justice to its passionate tone. For the Epistle as an *apologia pro vita sua*, cf. above, p. 21, note 48.

Also, his language, with a very few exceptions perhaps, is Platonic and uninfluenced by Hellenistic Greek. The document should therefore fall into the fourth century; it can hardly have been composed later than the turn from the fourth century to the third.<sup>140</sup>) And that the style is not unplatonic—some interpreters would even hold that it is very Platonic indeed—is a further indication that the document was written in the classical age. Such a successful imitation of the Platonic style is better understood in the era in which those dialogues were composed whose seemingly Platonic mode of expression has misled ancient and modern critics alike.<sup>141</sup>)

The results of the analysis given may allow one to narrow down still further the time span to be considered with regard to the origin of the letter. As I said, it can hardly have been written long before the end of Timoleon's career, at any rate, not before his success was fully assured, that is, before Dionysius had been expelled from Sicily (344 B.C.) and Timoleon had begun rebuilding Sicily and had defeated the Carthaginians (339 B.C.). In fact, at that time a defense of Plato was almost called for. Dionysius' loss of his empire—which in Plutarch's day was still the plainest illustration of the downfall of a great ruler (*Dion*, 50, 3)—created in its own day an

<sup>140</sup>) On the language, see above, p. 2 and note 6. For the terminology used in the philosophical digression, see below, II, notes 72; 114.

<sup>141</sup>) The judgment of the interpreters on the style of the letter differs greatly. Harward considers it compatible with Plato's "Altersstil" once the eccentricities of the arrangement are rightly understood (pp. 189 f.; 192; note *ad* 324 B 8; 333 D 1-7; see also Bluck, p. 178). Shorey says with reference to 350 E that the letter is "hopelessly confused in style, if the text is not corrupt" (*What Plato Said*, p. 45). The same divergency exists with regard to the echoes of phrases found in the dialogues. Harward calls the repetitions "a common feature in an old man's writings" (note 37, p. 202). Shorey believes that the text is "perhaps overloaded with Platonic reminiscences" (*ibid.*; also *ad Republic*, V, 508 A [The most important echoes have been listed by Boas, *Philos. Rev.*, 1948, pp. 454 f.]). To me, passages like 329 B seem to be even more involved than the style of the old Plato, and the excuse made in 330 C, to be a very artificial one. Moreover, sometimes, I think, a digression is introduced to divert the reader's attention (above, note 93) and the author has, in general, the tendency to skip over important points and to deal with them later (cf. Misch, p. 131). The number of "quotations" almost amounts to a fault. But I shall not attempt to argue the problem since such arguments are subjective and can always be decided either way (cf. Shorey, *What Plato Said*, pp. 40 f.). That the letter on the whole succeeds in approximating the Platonic style cannot, I think, be doubted. H. Richards, outspoken as he was in his rejection of the letter, rightly admitted "that if we judged by the Greek alone, we should have no reason for doubting" (*Platonica*, p. 292).

almost unbelievable stir. As Plutarch tells, people went to Corinth, where Dionysius lived after his expulsion, to see him. There was no Greek, he asserts, who did not long to behold and speak to him "on account of the change that Fortune had wrought in his life" (*Timoleon*, 14, 1). One of the visitors "derided him about his association with philosophers, finally asking him what good Plato's wisdom did him now." Whereupon the tyrant gave the not undignified answer: "Doest you think that I have had no help from Plato when I bear my change of Fortune as I do?" (15, 2). The story may well be apocryphal. Yet, it is clear that many people must have pondered the same question, that they must have wondered in addition what good Platonism had done Dionysius in the past. It is most probable that it is in order to allay these doubts that the letter maintains that Dionysius never was a pupil of Plato's.<sup>142)</sup>

On the other hand, Timoleon's achievement by contrast made the role Plato had played appear a sorry one. While the philosopher had failed over a period of almost four decades in his attempt to carry out his political programme, the general, who lacked all philosophical training, succeeded in liberating Sicily within eight years. He had, Plutarch again tells, "by general confession performed the greatest and most glorious deeds of any Greek of his time, and [had] been the only one to succeed in those achievements to which the rhetoricians, in their speeches at the national assemblies, were ever exhorting the Greeks" (37, 3). Moreover, Timoleon had met their demands without doing evil. He had united the people. The Platonists had engaged in internecine warfare and had brought destruction to Sicily. Must this not have cast doubts on the value of Plato's political theory, on his dream of a philosopher-king, of the ideal city? It was necessary, then, to show that Plato had been opposed to all violence from the beginning, that his friends had not listened to him, that he had been defeated by fate, that had he been given a chance, he would have triumphed.<sup>143)</sup>

<sup>142)</sup> Cf. above, p. 23. Aristoxenus (Fr. 32 [Wehrli]) relates that he asked Dionysius what his complaint against Plato was. The tyrant answered "that of the many ills with which tyranny abounded there was none so great as this, that not one of those reputed to be friends speaks frankly with the tyrant; for indeed it was by such friends that he himself had been deprived of Plato's good will" (Plutarch, *Timoleon*, XV, 3). The story is significant not only because it shows how great the interest in Dionysius was, but also because it suggests that Aristoxenus was the authority for a representation of Dionysius as a man of stature; see above, note 103.

<sup>143)</sup> Perhaps the most unlikely feature of the characterization of Plato; see

If, as one is led to assume, the Seventh Epistle was written at the earliest ten years after Plato's death, and possibly, even later, sometime after Timoleon had ended his career (337-6), the "forger" was confronted with much literature which was hostile to Plato. Philistus, Plato's opponent at the court of Dionysius, had published his account of the Sicilian affairs, in which he polemicized against Plato and his policy. The histories of Ephorus and Theopompus also dealt with Sicily. Letters were preserved, or at any rate known, which Timonides the Leucadian, a former pupil of the Academy, addressed to Speusippus, and in which he reported on Dion's expedition in which he had participated. Letters by Speusippus himself, who supposedly accompanied Plato on his third voyage, as Xenocrates was said to have done on the second, are also referred to in the tradition. This whole literature, by its very existence, provided another challenge to write on Plato's share in the Sicilian enterprise, just as it provided material, where it was needed, even on what went on in closed circles.<sup>144</sup>)

In discussing the time at which the letter was composed, I have already touched on the motives of the author in writing an apology for Plato. He wishes to defend the master against criticism levelled at him after the event, as it were; he wants him to tell his own version of the story presented by others, often in a hostile spirit. But he is also intent on defending him against accusations that might easily have originated in Plato's lifetime. Several such charges are pointed to in the letter itself.

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above, p. 26. The general reaction to Timoleon's achievement will not have been very different from what it was in the nineteenth century, when Grote contrasted the Platonist Dion unfavorably with the empiricist Timoleon (XI, p. 177).

<sup>144</sup>) On the historical sources mentioned see e.g. Harward, pp. 29 f.; 53 ff. (Timonides); also Morrow, pp. 21 f. For Philistus, 556 T 5 f.; 111 [Jacoby]; for Speusippus' letters, Diogenes Laertius IV, 4 = B 1 [Lang]. As the analysis has shown, the narrative does not reveal any facts which only Plato could have known. If the letter reports on a conversation in the garden between Dionysius and Plato (348 C, see above, note 100), Plutarch tells of a conversation between Dionysius and Dion on the seashore (14, 4 [from Philistus?; cf. Morrow, p. 33]). Nor does the epistle show "a frankness for a parallel to which we must go to Rousseau or Augustine" (Harward, p. 72; see also above, note 20). On the whole, Plato is seen from without (cf. Misch, p. 158; cf. also 120). His character is illuminated through a description of his activities. This is in agreement with the rules of ancient autobiography, to which self-analysis is foreign (cf. Misch, I, 1, pp. 167 [ἡθός]; 172 [βίος]). And the same rules apply to ancient epistolography in general (cf. below, p. 157).

The writer knows that "there are many others who make it their care to glorify the doings of Callippus and will continue to do so in time to come" (334 A). The Plato of the letter, just as he is opposed to all violence in politics, also abhors political assassination. Another charge which is expressly mentioned is that it was unbecoming for Plato to enter into any relation with a tyrant (329 B). The charge is treated as if it had been made on the basis of an inconsistency between Plato's personality and philosophy, and his actions. In actuality, the censure was probably due to political animosities. The Academy was criticized frequently on the grounds that it favored tyrannical regimes.<sup>145</sup> Moreover, the Athenian democrats cannot have looked with favor on Plato's support of a tyrant, who was in addition an ally of Sparta (Isocrates, VI, 63 [Archidemus]). The letter maintains that when Plato was considering whether or not to accept Dionysius' second invitation, the Athenians were literally "pushing him out" (339 D). Concern over accusations resulting from distrust in Plato's loyalty to Athens and its tradition is often noticeable in the course of the narrative. Speaking as an Athenian, he is made to uphold the honor of his mother city against her detractors (334 B; cf. 336 D). If he did not participate in Athens' political life, it was Fate that prevented him from doing so (324 C); he praises the restored democracy as against the regime of the Thirty, on account of its moderation (325 B).<sup>146</sup>

The same concern over Plato's patriotism seems to be reflected in the author's view of Plato's political principles. This is obviously true of the rule by friendship, which is attributed to him and which is likened to the practice of the Athenians of the fifth century (332 B-C). It is also true, I think, of Plato's advocacy of *isonomia*, the battle-cry of Athenian democracy. Though the forger had to make the forerunner of Timoleon a democrat, he can hardly have been unaware of the fact that as such, Plato also became a better citizen of Athens. He may even have felt that in this he was saying nothing new or startling. For he is hardly the first, and certainly not the only one, in whose opinion Plato was a friend of the demo-

<sup>145</sup> Concerning Platonists involved in the setting up of tyrannies, see Athenaeus, IX, 508 C, and in general, Zeller, II, 1<sup>4</sup>, p. 420, note 1.

<sup>146</sup> The passage 331 B-D was taken as an apology for Plato's political inactivity already by Cicero (*Ep.* I, 9, 18; cf. M. Pohlenz, *Aus Platos Werdezeit*, 1913, p. 118, note 1). On Plato's "Apolitie" see Burckhardt, III, pp. 393 f. and above, pp. 16; 25. That the topic was much discussed can be concluded from the fact that other Platonic letters refer to it; see below, p. 124.

cratic regime. There are testimonies that speak of members of the Academy as tyrannicides, and Plutarch, not a mean Platonist or a man without judgment, has no hesitation in talking of Dion and Brutus as having "set out from one training-school, as it were, to engage in the greatest struggles" (*Dion*, I, 1). More important, the ambiguities inherent in Plato's political theory, his blending of the monarchical and democratic principles, appear from early times on to have led to different evaluations of his stand. Some hailed him as a conservative (Dicaearchus Fr. 41 [Wehrli]), others saw in him a liberal, a defender of equality of property (Ps. Demosthenes, *Ep.* V, 3; cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, II, 6, 1265 a 38).<sup>147</sup>

What was told in the "absurd and irrational stories" concerning Plato's motives in going to Sicily—stories which the "pious forger" is most anxious to refute (352 A)—he does not say. But one can at least make a reasonable guess as to their content. An anecdote has Diogenes the Cynic tease Plato for not enjoying Sicilian dishes though he once had sailed for their sake to Sicily (Diogenes Laertius, VI, 25). It is not by chance, then, that the letter stigmatizes the luxury of the Sicilians and emphasizes Plato's disgust with "the blissful life," as it is there termed" (326 B; cf. 336 C). He did not go there to indulge in the proverbial Sicilian luxury.<sup>148</sup> Nor did

<sup>147</sup> See also the story according to which Plato refused to give laws to the Arcadians and Thebans because they were opposed to equality of possessions (Diogenes Laertius, III, 24 τὸ ἴσον; Aelian, *Varia Historia*, II, 42 τὴν ἰσονομίαν [Zeller, II, 1<sup>4</sup>, pp. 422, note 1 and Friedländer, I<sup>2</sup>, p. 108 on Platonists as tyrannicides]). Although the dialogues never endorse the democratic principle as the highest, they evaluate it differently. While the *Republic* places oligarchy above democracy, the *Politicus* places democracy above oligarchy, especially a democracy which observes obedience to the laws (302 C); see E. Barker, *Greek Political Theory*, 1951<sup>4</sup>, p. 291. And in the *Laws*, which combines the democratic and monarchic principles, it is laid down that all men are equal before the law, that all of them are allowed to vote, that all must have some property, though not all their votes have the same weight, nor is their property of the same size (V, 739 E). The democratic interpretation, then, is not made of whole cloth, but it is a half-truth, as is the aristocratic interpretation of Plato (cf. Dicaearchus, Fr. 41 [Wehrli], and Jaeger, *S.B. Berl.*, 1928, p. 419). Cf. also below, p. 164.

<sup>148</sup> For the reports on Plato's debauchery in Sicily, see Zeller, II, 1<sup>4</sup>, p. 413, note 1; Novotny *ad* 326 B 5. The Aristippus who wrote Περὶ τρυφῆς is late (see Wilamowitz, "Antigonos v. Karystos," *Phil. Unters.*, IV, 1881, pp. 48 ff.). If Diogenes Laertius can be trusted, Diogenes taunted Plato about his love of Sicilian dishes (VI, 35; Zeller, p. 429, note 1). Alexis, in his Παράσιτος, attacked Plato (Diogenes Laertius, III, 28). Aristoxenus (Fr. 62 [Wehrli]) states that Plato could not stand the life of a parasite for more than a few days.

he become involved in the Sicilian adventure to seek power—he was “invited”—or merely to help his friends—though friendship counted with him a good deal. Still less, did he go because it was to his personal advantage to be on good terms with the great ruler of Sicily who could provide him with money or whatever else he needed or wished to have, as other sources claim. The letter insists that Plato did not receive money from Dionysius. He went in the service of philosophy.<sup>149</sup> Finally, he did not become an adherent of Dion’s cause on account of an erotic attachment. Dicaearchus taunts Plato “for having given authority to love” (Fr. 43 [Wehrli]). As the last two lines of the Platonic epigram on Dion put it, “A people mourns now where thou liest low, / Dion, whose love once set my soul aglow” (Ep. 6 [Diehl]). The author of the Seventh Letter exalts Dion merely as the best, the most promising of all of Plato’s pupils; it glorifies his death as a noble death suffered in accordance with the teaching of philosophy. Dionysius’ passionate longing to replace Dion in Plato’s affection is reported with the almost ironical comment that he failed to do the one and only thing that could have gained him Plato’s friendship, namely, to study philosophy (330 B). Plato was “to temptation slow,” he was not under the sway of sensual love.<sup>150</sup>

<sup>149</sup> Ehippus, a poet of the middle comedy (Athenaeus, XI, 508 b ff.), knows of “subventions” paid to Plato (see Grote, XI, p. 74, note 4). Plutarch says delicately that Dion defrayed the expenses of a chorus that Plato had to furnish (*Dion*, 17, 2). It is not necessary to investigate the accuracy of such stories (e.g. Diogenes Laertius, VI, 58 on Plato’s flattery of tyrants, or III, 9 on his receipt of money for buying books [perhaps from Aristoxenus; see Geffcken, *Hermes*, 1929, p. 94, and below, p. 67]). Plato’s relation with the powerful and rich Sicilian court was likely to be misunderstood and to be interpreted as advantageous to him. The Seventh Letter, as I have shown, is much concerned with Plato’s probity in questions of money (contrary to Zeller, 429, note 3; see above, p. 47), while other letters take it for granted that he profited from his alliance with the tyrant; see below, p. 132.

<sup>150</sup> The sixth Platonic epigram, which celebrates Plato’s love for Dion, is usually considered genuine (Shorey, *What Plato Said*, p. 45; C. M. Bowra, “Plato’s Epigram on Dion’s death,” *A.J.P.*, 59, 1938, pp. 394 ff.; H. Herter, “Platons Dioneppigramm,” *Rh. Mus.*, 92, 1944, pp. 289 ff.). Its eroticism seems to me unplatonic (cf. *Laws*, VIII, 836 ff., and in general, *A.J.P.*, 83, 1962, pp. 8-10). The argument, “Who else could have written it?” (Shorey, *ibid.*) is surely unconvincing; one might apply it to the *Alcibiades* or the *Epinomis* and yet not settle the problems concerning the content of the dialogues. If one assumed that the epigram is genuine, one would have to conclude that the author of the letter is not in accord with what Plato says—it would not be the only instance of his disagreement with the master—and prefers to imagine him in the likeness of the Socrates of the *Symposium*. (The

Up to this point, the analysis of the author's motives could be guided by his own explicit remarks or by the implications of the text. One is left without any pointers when one asks what could possibly have induced the writer to represent the greatest of the theoretical philosophers as a man dedicated to action more than to speculation. And yet this question is perhaps the most crucial and the one the critic of the letter can least afford to leave unanswered. One is, then, forced to hazard an explanation. Its nature is suggested, I think, by the often voiced criticisms of Plato's philosophy and the manner in which the generation after Plato defined the meaning of philosophy.

Plato's teaching was attacked even in his own time as mere theorizing without practical value. Isocrates' criticism to this effect is only one example. Following in the footsteps of his teacher, Isocrates, Theopompus, in his book "Against the Platonic school," tried to prove not only that most of Plato's dialogues were full of falsehoods, but also that they were "useless" (Athenaeus, XI, p. 508 C-D = 115 F. 259 [Jacoby]). The comic poet, Amphis, has a slave say to his master who is in love: "And as for the good, whatever that be, that you are likely to get on her account, I know no more about it, master, than I do of the Good of Plato" (Diogenes Laertius, III, 27). Other fragments from the Middle Comedy make fun of the Plato in the ivory tower, just as Aristophanes had made Socrates sit in his "thinking shop" (φροντιστήριον).<sup>151</sup> A philosopher "dreading self-reproach most of all, lest haply I should seem to myself to be utterly and absolutely nothing more than a mere voice and never to undertake willingly any action" (328 C)—such a philosopher might have escaped the railings of the comic writers and should have satisfied even Theopompus. For he did act, and though he would still, in the historian's eyes, have erred in his judgment on human affairs, he was worldly-wise enough, from the very beginning, to be sceptical of the chances for success; he saw through

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letter deviates from the epigram on the reasons for Dion's downfall, too; see above, note 125).

<sup>151</sup> More comic fragments are brought together by Diogenes, *loc. cit.* (According to Plutarch [*Dion*, 14, 2, perhaps from Philistius], Plato's Sicilian enemies speak of the *σιωπώμενον ἄγαθόν* as characteristic of Plato's teaching [see Grote, XI, p. 64, note 3].) For Theopompus and Plato, cf. also T 7; 48; F 275; 294; 359 (cf. Geffcken, *Hermes*, 1959, p. 100). Plato himself ironically calls the philosophers "useless" (*ἀχρήστους*), e.g. *Republic*, VI, 487 D; 489 B; 490 E; 499 B.



Dionysius; he was defeated not by his own mistakes, but by those which others made, by his ill-luck.<sup>152)</sup>

But how could the author of the Seventh Letter have the audacity to transform the Plato devoted to the ideal of *theoria* into the Plato for whom *praxis* is at least as important as *theoria*, if not more so? The answer to this riddle can be found, first, in the development that took place in the Academy itself. Plato's immediate pupils stressed the practical virtues more than had their teacher. Even the Academy of Arcesilaus showed much interest in political affairs. For, with the gradual defeat of Platonic transcendentalism, there arose a new appreciation of reality.<sup>153)</sup> However, changes in the thinking of the Academy, though they may have led to a reinterpretation of some of Plato's views, do not suffice to justify a complete reversal of his basis tenet. This metamorphosis, which the epistle presupposes, is, I suggest, in the last analysis inspired by Aristoxenus and Dicaearchus, the pupils of Aristotle. They upheld—against Aristotle and Theophrastus, and ultimately, against Plato—the thesis that the *summum bonum* is to be found in practical achievement rather than in theoretical thought; that philosophy itself derives not from theoretical speculation, but from practical considerations.<sup>154)</sup> It was in this spirit that the two

<sup>152)</sup> As the analysis has shown, the author emphasizes the misgivings Plato had from the beginning, and his fear of the fickleness of youth (328 B), which turns out to be justified. It is also made clear that Plato has no illusion about the atmosphere that prevails at the court of a tyrant (327 B and above, p. 22) or about the character of the tyrannical regime. He can foresee that if he fails to accept Dionysius' invitation, Dion might be banished (D); when Dion is removed from Sicily, he expects to be punished as an accomplice in the alleged plot (329 C); he sees through the pretenses made by Dionysius—whose requests are coupled with compulsory power as is the case with all tyrants (D); he is aware of the double play behind the announcement that "Dionysius is wonderfully devoted to Plato" (330 A). In short, the author has made good use of the analysis of the tyrant given in the *Republic*, which begins with the words: "They associate with flatterers, who are ready to do anything to serve them, or, if they themselves want something, they themselves fawn and shrink from no contortion or abasement in protest of their friendship, though once the object gained, they sing another tune" (IX, 575 E-76 A). On this topic in general, see Misch, pp. 131; 153 ff.

<sup>153)</sup> On this development, see below, p. 117; on the political activity of the old Academy, Friedländer, I<sup>1</sup>, p. 333, note 29.

<sup>154)</sup> Cf. in general, W. Jaeger, "Über Ursprung und Kreislauf des philosophischen Lebensideals," *SB Berl.*, 1928, pp. 390 ff.; for the interpretation of Pythagoreanism, E. Frank, "The Fundamental Opposition of Plato and Aristotle," *A.J.P.*, 64, 1943, pp. 233 f. (Plato himself does not see the Pythagoreans as statesmen.)

Peripatetics undertook to rewrite the history of earlier Greek philosophy. In their hands, the Seven Sages became men of practical action. The Pythagorean society, dedicated to asceticism and rational understanding, turned into a political fraternity intent on establishing a worldly rule. The author must have been just as familiar with this revision of the history of philosophy and of the philosophy of its history as he was aware of the changing tenor of the Academic teaching. In fact, his interpretation of Plato has some details in common with that of Aristoxenus and Dicaearchus.<sup>155)</sup> Thus one may say that the Plato of the Seventh Letter was invented in a period in which the deed had become more important than the word. It was a time very much like the second half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, when the letter, after having been relegated to the realm of fiction for a long time, was again accepted by so many scholars as genuine.<sup>156)</sup>

And yet, the pious forger has gone too far. The Plato who loathes his ill-luck, who complains about the shattering of all his hopes, who feels at the mercy of Fate, is less convincing than the Plato who, according to Plutarch, bids Dionysius farewell, saying with a smile: "Heaven forbid that there should be such a dearth of topics for discussion in the Academy that anyone mention thee." He is less convincing than the Plato who left unchanged the claim made in the *Laws* that the philosopher's greatest hope is to find a young tyrant willing to follow his advice, than the Plato who, to the end of his life, did not waver in his political convictions and did not change his views because his own experiences had not vindicated them.<sup>157)</sup> The whole concept of Plato the man and the philosopher

<sup>155)</sup> Aristoxenus, relating that Plato served three times in the army (Fr. 61 [Wehrli]), obviously likens his life to that of Socrates (as has been pointed out by Zeller, II, 1<sup>4</sup>, p. 394, note 2). The author of the letter assimilates Plato's biography to that of the Socrates of the *Phaedo* to an even greater extent (cf. above, p. 11, and note 22). As the historian of Pythagoreanism, Aristoxenus seems also to have dealt with Plato's relation to that school (Fr. 43), which the letter emphasizes (339 D; 350 A and below, p. 115). Dicaearchus, who makes Plato write poetry in his youth and participate in the agon (Fr. 40 [Wehrli]), accuses him of Pythagorizing (Fr. 41); cf. also above, p. 65, on Fr. 43.

<sup>156)</sup> Cf. above, pp. 1 f. The influence of the temper of the time was perhaps more important than that the historians who vindicated the letters "need them in their business" (Shorey, *What Plato Said*, p. 41), for they did not really follow them in their own analyses of the events (above, p. 57).

<sup>157)</sup> Thus Zeller (II, 1<sup>4</sup>, p. 423, note 3) in agreement with Hermann (contrary to Wilamowitz, above, note 124).

proposed in the epistle is in contradiction with the spirit and the letter of Platonic teaching. There are also many specific untruths or half-truths and inconsistencies with the content of the dialogues: Plato's advocacy of democracy, his opposition to violent measures in the reform of the political scene, his diplomatic reserve in telling the truth to those in high places. If he did not wish to deceive anyone, the author has even failed to be persuasive. One does not feel that the story he set out to tell is the story of what could have been or could have happened.

But were the author allowed to return to this world and to defend himself against this accusation, as the Protagoras of the *Theaetetus* (165 E) is allowed to answer the interpretation of his doctrine, proposed in that dialogue, he too would probably "put up a good fight for his offspring" (164 E). "Maybe I have been partial to Plato and Dion and a little unfair to Dionysius," he would say. "Maybe I have credited Plato with too much foresight. He did not really speculate about the Carthaginians and the repopulation of Sicily, although, being a great man, he might well have done what seems to you impossible. But when you argue against my representation of his views on politics, or of his general philosophical creed, and even of himself and his life, you always rely on what you find in his dialogues. You forget that, as I shall point out to you in my philosophical digression, they cannot be read as you are reading them, namely, as if they were the only source of information about Plato and his opinions. In fact, you will learn from me that much is known concerning all these matters that is not contained in his written work. Then you will perhaps change your mind and judge me less harshly. I am, to be sure, speaking for Plato, but I do not see him as incorrectly as you are now inclined to think." Confronted with such an objection, one must grant that the author of the Seventh Letter has not yet been fully unmasked. The final decision on the value of his work will rest on the analysis of what he has to say about Plato's philosophy, its content and method.

## II

### THE PHILOSOPHICAL DIGRESSION

Though what the epistle tells about Plato's teaching is incidental to the historical narrative, it has, as I said at the very beginning, influenced the modern interpretation of Plato as much as the autobiography. If the latter has reshaped the view of Plato's life and political theory, the so-called "philosophical digression" (342 A-344 B) in particular has changed the view of his philosophy. But even when there is agreement on the genuineness of the passage, no agreement exists concerning the exact meaning of the statement of Plato's thought. One finds in it either an attitude characteristic of the dialogues, yet slightly modified, or a further development of ideas contained in the written works. Or, again, one detects an entirely new approach to the solution of problems raised in the dialogues.<sup>1)</sup>

The result of my previous investigation naturally creates a prejudice to the effect that the representation of Plato's philosophy too is invented. It is, then, all the more obligatory for the interpreter to undertake his task in an unbiased spirit. The possibility that he will have to revise his judgment cannot be rejected outright. On the other hand, if there are reasons for doubting that the letter states Plato's philosophy, he need not immediately conclude that the philosophical digression is without value. During recent decades, the debate on the subject has been marked by exaggerations. The defenders of the Seventh Letter often consider the document the most elaborate expression of Plato's final views. The opponents tend to debase the philosophy contained in it and therefore to reject the letter altogether.<sup>2)</sup> Some scholars, to be sure, are more

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<sup>1)</sup> The differences between the dialogues and the Seventh Letter are stressed e.g. by Stenzel ("Der Begriff d. Erleuchtung bei Platon," *Kl. Schrift.*, pp. 165 f.; 168 f.), though he admits that there is a continuous development. Howald (pp. 42; 49) considers the doctrine of the letter unique. Bluck (*Plato's Life and Thought*) seems to take the epistle and the dialogues to be almost identical in outlook (p. 148).

<sup>2)</sup> I quote e.g. Wilamowitz' "the rejected building stone which must be

cautious. Assuming that the letter itself is genuine, they maintain that the philosophical digression must have been added by someone else.<sup>3)</sup> My intention is simply to resolve the question of authenticity, keeping in mind that even if the philosophical digression is not Plato's *professio fidei*, it could still be a most interesting interpretation of his position.

The philosophical digression is embedded in the report of his third voyage to Sicily. It is preceded by a story telling of a test (340 B-341 A) which Plato gave to Dionysius after his arrival in order to find out whether he was really concerned with philosophy, as Plato had heard—a rumour to this effect had finally determined him to accept Dionysius' invitation (339 D-E). The description of this test is followed by a statement of Plato's own attitude toward writing about philosophy (341 B-E), which serves to introduce the philosophical digression. The digression itself clarifies, through a more detailed account, the "argument" which confronts anyone trying to write on philosophical problems, and ends with a renewed indictment of the philosopher who writes (344 C-D). Much can be learned from the passages which form the framework for the résumé of Plato's epistemology, and I shall therefore treat them as a unity, starting with the test given to Dionysius.

### I. THE PHILOSOPHICAL TEST

In order to understand fully why Plato decided to test Dionysius' devotion to philosophy, one must remember that although he had come on his previous trip in the hope of converting Dionysius to philosophy and of instituting political reforms as dictated by philosophy, he had had, according to the letter, no philosophical converse with Dionysius (330 B; cf. 338 E). Understandably, then, the reports that had reached him later about Dionysius' philosophical interests (338 B; 339 B; 340 B) did not set his mind at rest. Prepared as he was to find that Dionysius had, in fact, become enamoured with "the best life through hearing lectures on subjects of importance"

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made the corner stone" (*R.E. s.v. Platon*, XX, 2, col. 2531, 61), and Richard's "skimble-skamble stuff" and "nonsense" (*Platonica*, pp. 278; 291).

<sup>3)</sup> It was Ritter who in his commentary on Plato's *Laws* athetized the philosophical digression (cf. also *Philol. Wochenschr.*, 1929, 522-29 [Philip of Opus, 24]); for the literature, see Stenzel, "Über d. Aufbau der Erkenntnis im VII. Platon. Brief," *Kl. Schrift.*, p. 85; also Harward, p. 213 (note 95).

(339 E), he still considered it his duty to determine "in which way the matter really stood" (*ibid.*).

Now if one wishes "to gain proof" (ἐλεγχον λαβεῖν) of a person's philosophical interest, there is a "method of testing such matters (τις τρόπος τοῦ περὶ ταῦτα πείραν λαβεῖν) which is not ignoble, but really suitable in the case of tyrants, and especially such as are crammed with borrowed doctrines" (340 B). It consists in pointing out what philosophy is in general, what its character is, how many things it is concerned with, and how much labor it entails. <sup>4)</sup> If the prospective pupil is "really inflamed by philosophy, as it were by fire" (*ibid.*), if he is "truly philosophic" (340 C), he will go on willingly with the venture however difficult it may be; if he is "in reality not philosophic, but superficially tinged by opinions—like men whose bodies are seen burnt on the surface" (340 D), he will desist from the enterprise. The danger of giving such a test is that some, having taken it, believe that "they have heard enough about the subject and that no more is required of them" (341 A). On the other hand, it is the clearest and safest test to show up those who are luxurious and cannot persevere in their effort, and it prevents them "from ever casting the blame on their instructor instead of themselves and their own inability to do all that the subject requires of them" (*ibid.*).

What kind of a test is this? And what does it accomplish? Apparently, it consists in one conversation, or rather one lecture, setting forth the greatness of the task the student faces. Informed of what lies ahead of him, he will either take up the work, or not undertake it at all, depending on his natural inclinations. <sup>5)</sup> It is surely not the selection of a student by the teacher on the basis of his philosophical ability. It simply gives an indication of the endurance of the neophyte, and not a very accurate one at that, since he is judged by his reaction to a single lecture. Moreover, according to the letter, he who then pursues philosophy lives "occupied indeed with whatever occupations he may find himself in, but always beyond all else cleaving fast to philosophy" (340 D). The *Republic*,

<sup>4)</sup> For the specific nature of the test proposed here, see below, note 12.

<sup>5)</sup> As the text says, Plato did not explain the matter fully to Dionysius (341 A-B); it is therefore quite possible that the exposition given here is abbreviated. Nevertheless, one can determine the meaning of the test and its purpose. Harward's doubts about the intelligibility of the passage (p. 26) seem to me unjustified (see below, note 12).

however, sees the relationship of the men of practical affairs to philosophy in an entirely different light. It asks them to get a good education in their youth (VI, 498 B), then to do their work without paying heed to philosophy, and afterwards, when they are past the age of political and military service, they should at last "be given free range of the pasture and do nothing but philosophize, except incidentally" (C). The *Republic*, then, does not permit the combination of practical and theoretical life which the letter advocates, not to mention that, unlike the letter, it prescribes a series of tests for the guardian in actual "toils and fears and pleasures" (*Republic*, VI, 503 E), in physical exercise (VII, 537 B) and even in dialectical ability (πείρα διαλεκτικῆς φύσεως, 537 C) through the study of separate subjects, a comprehensive survey of their relations (D), and finally, in holding commands in war and in administering offices (539 E). <sup>6</sup>

Moreover, nowhere in the dialogues is Plato concerned that the pupil might blame the teacher for his failure; nor does he ever give a test in order that this result might be avoided. To be sure, the author of the *Apology* cannot have been unaware of the fact that those who misunderstand their teacher may turn against him. <sup>7</sup>) The *Theaetetus* directly states that "people have often felt [like a woman robbed of her first child toward Socrates practising his maeutic art], and have "been positively ready to bite [him] for taking away some foolish notion they have conceived" (151 C; cf. 150 E). But in the *Republic*, Plato is anxious to select the right person for philosophical study so that no blame can be attached to philosophy (VII, 535 B ff. cf. 539 A). In all these instances, if any value judgment is made at all, Plato's concern is with the subject he teaches or the individual taught, as the teacher's concern ought to be, and not with the welfare of the teacher.

For a moment, one may think that the forger—for the writer can hardly be Plato—believes in the closeness of the Platonic and Pythagorean schools, and ascribes to the master a method similar to the well-known method of testing the novice which the Pythagoreans applied. Or that he has in mind such tests as Xenocrates

<sup>6</sup>) Very different from these passages is the one in the *Theaetetus* (177 B) where Socrates claims that in a private confrontation he could refute those who are sceptical of philosophical arguments; it may, however, have inspired the author of the letter (below, note 12).

<sup>7</sup>) See especially *Apology*, 33 D ff.; also 24 A.

is supposed to have given to his pupils.<sup>8)</sup> But both these hypotheses become unlikely once one reflects on the assertion that the method described is "really suitable in the case of tyrants and especially such as are crammed with borrowed doctrines" (340 B). Not many candidates for the Academy, or any other school for that matter, are likely to have been tyrants or sons of tyrants, or "luxurious and incapable of enduring labors" (341 A). One is, therefore, led to suspect that the method in question was invented to fit the special situation and serves a special purpose within its context. Other considerations make this suspicion almost a certainty.

The Seventh Letter insists, here and throughout, that Dionysius never became a pupil of Plato's. It does not mention any preparatory studies to be undertaken by him. Other ancient sources, however, take it for granted that Dionysius received some kind of instruction from Plato and speak of the courses in geometry he was advised to take.<sup>9)</sup> Modern historians usually accept these ancient reports, and it does indeed seem unlikely that in all the years of their relation the author of the *Republic* did not start Dionysius on some philosophical studies, and in particular, on geometry, the indispensable preparatory study. But at the same time, the modern historians doubt that it was wise of Plato to prescribe such a course of training. If he had contented himself, they say, "with inculcating the general principles which he has expounded with such charm in the *Republic*, Dionysius would in all likelihood have attempted to create at Syracuse a dim adumbration of the ideal state. It is hardly likely that it would have been long maintained; still it would at least have been essayed. But Plato insisted on imparting to his pupil a systematic course of philosophical training, and began with the science of geometry. The tyrant took up the study with eagerness; his court was absorbed in geometry; but he presently wearied of it. And then influences which were opposed to the scheme of Dion and Plato began to tell."<sup>10)</sup>

Even if there were no evidence to this effect, one would assume that the ancient critics of Plato felt the same way as do the moderns. The third Platonic letter makes it clear that Plato was, in fact,

<sup>8)</sup> For the Pythagorean method of testing, see e.g. Zeller, I, 16, p. 400. For Xenocrates, cf. Plutarch, *On moral virtue*, 12, p. 452 d = Fr. 2 [Heinze]. Arcesilaus, too, seems to have tested his students (Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrh.*, I, 234); but see below, note 115.

<sup>9)</sup> Cf. above, p. 23.

<sup>10)</sup> Bury, *op. cit.*, p. 654.



charged with lack of foresight in antiquity too. As the letter has it, Dionysius says to Plato: "'You bade me be educated before I did all these things (regarding political action) or else not do them.' I [Plato] replied that your memory was excellent. You then said—'Did you mean educated in land measuring or what?' But I refrained from making the retort which it occurred to me to make, for I was alarmed about the homeward voyage I was hoping for, lest instead of an open road I should find it shut, and all because of a short saying" (319 B-D). Dionysius' answer, given "in a most indignant and mocking tone" and "with a very artificial laugh" (319 B), and Plato's fear of the possible consequence of Dionysius' mockery and laughter, attest that there was an ancient tradition according to which Dionysius considered the plan of study prescribed by Plato an insult, either immediately, or after some time, when he grew tired of it.<sup>11)</sup>

In Plato's eyes this surely was Dionysius' fault. Yet in the eyes of Plato's critics the reaction of the tyrant will have seemed only natural. It is, I suggest, in order to avoid this well-founded charge that the Seventh Letter has Plato give a simple and innocuous test, which Dionysius fails. Thus Plato proves how worldly-wise he is in these matters. He does not commit himself to the task of educating a tyrant before he has found out whether the tyrant is a philosopher; he has a method even tyrants cannot resent; as he generally talks to them in "veiled language," so he does not cross-examine them; a gentle protreptic speech, and one speech at that, will do. If the tyrant listens to what is said, it is safe to go ahead. If he does not, he has been warned in advance and cannot cast the blame "on his instructor instead of on himself." As usual, then, Plato does the right thing, and in addition, Dionysius must take the responsibility for not having become a philosopher.<sup>12)</sup>

<sup>11)</sup> Harward, too, compares the test of the Seventh Letter with the passage quoted from the second (pp. 26 and 167).

<sup>12)</sup> Cf. above, p. 61. The test, which Dionysius failed (344 D), provided the one occasion on which he was instructed by Plato—as is most emphatically stated. Plato explained his philosophy "on one occasion only and never again since then," not "a second time or a third time, or still more often" (345 A; Apelt's suggestion [note 67] that "the test was not confined to a simple interview," but took the form of a slow course of introductory lessons in philosophy, is rightly rejected by Harward, p. 211 [note 85]). The only interpreters who have noted the specific character of the test seem to be Stenzel, who calls it a "Fürstenprobe" (*Platon der Erzieher*, p. 308), and Howald (pp. 31 f.). I cannot believe that the passage described is the best

But perhaps one will wonder why the "forger," being an intelligent interpreter, invents a test so obviously unsatisfactory. Could he not have had Plato test Dionysius' philosophical gifts and show that he was unable to understand Plato's philosophy and that therefore Plato could not become his teacher? He could not, I think. It was common knowledge that the tyrant had philosophical and literary interests, that he was wont to converse with philosophers who came to his court.<sup>13)</sup> The letter itself expressly admits that Dionysius was "naturally gifted. . . with a capacity for learning" (338 D; cf. 339 E). This is said in the introduction to the report on the third voyage and immediately before the test is described. There was, then, only one possibility. Plato could try to find out whether or not Dionysius was in earnest in his philosophical concerns, whether or not he was truly dedicated. Since his intellectual endowment could not be questioned, there was occasion only for testing his moral fibre.<sup>14)</sup>

## 2. PLATO'S VIEWS ON PHILOSOPHICAL WRITING

Although the letter insists that Dionysius cannot be familiar with Platonic philosophy, it admits that the tyrant thought otherwise. And this is the reason why he did not ask Plato to expound the matter fully (nor did Plato do so on his own initiative); Dionysius believed that "he himself knew many of the most important doctrines and was sufficiently informed owing to the versions he

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exposé of Plato's concept of learning (Stenzel, *loc. cit.*). It is, rather, an invention modelled perhaps after *Theaetetus*, 177 B (cf. above, note 6).

<sup>13)</sup> See *R.E. s.v.* col. 906, 3 ff.

<sup>14)</sup> Commenting on 338 D-C, Hackforth says: "The sudden change to the present tense . . . seems to me one of those slight but all important evidences of authenticity in which the Epistle abounds. It would never have occurred even to the cleverest of forgers" (pp. 120 f.; cf. Harward, *ad. loc.*), and he adds that since the document is largely a justification of Plato, it is most unlikely that "anyone save Plato" himself would have included the praise of Dionysius' gifts (p. 121). But the compliment is coupled with a denunciation, for Dionysius is at the same time accused of "an extraordinary love of glory" (338 D; cf. 344 E); and the tyrant is in general blamed for his disrespect toward the master (344 E-345 A), cf. above, p. 51. Moreover, how could one understand that Plato was willing to go at all to Dionysius' court if there was not some reason to expect that he had the capacity to learn? Nor would the denunciation be convincing were what was common knowledge—that the tyrant was gifted—not admitted. (Cf. above, p. 61 and note 142).

had heard from his other teachers" (341 B-C).<sup>15</sup> Since, as the letter contends, the Master had taught him nothing on his second trip, and he was ashamed to admit that he had had no lessons from Plato and cherished the desire to know "more explicitly" what his doctrines were (338 D-E), he had apparently done his best to inform himself by consulting others. This the letter seems to find reprehensible. Yet it would appear to be a reasonable procedure. After all, the Platonic dialogues were common property. Plato's views on philosophy must have been known to all and sundry. Why, then, could one not have learned about them from others?

The answer to this question emerges from what the letter has to say about a book which Dionysius wrote later "on what he then heard from [Plato]", composing it "as though it were something of his own invention and quite different from what he had heard" (341 B), and calling it a treatise "about the highest and first truths of Nature" (344 D).<sup>16</sup> While Plato has apparently not seen the book, but has only heard about it, he does not hesitate to pronounce the verdict that it can have nothing to do with his own philosophy. Remembering "certain others [who] have written about these same subjects" treated by Dionysius (341 B), and fearing that in the future more people will undertake to write about them, he declares—concerning all these interpreters, contemporary as well as prospective, "who claim to know the subjects which I seriously study (σπουδάζω) whether as hearers of mine or of other teachers, or from their own discoveries"—that they cannot possibly understand the matter at issue. "There does not exist nor will there ever exist any treatise of mine dealing therewith, for it does not at all admit of verbal expression like other studies, but as a result of continued application to the subject itself and communion therewith it is brought to birth in the soul (ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ) on a sudden, as light that is kindled by a leaping spark, and thereafter it nourishes itself" (341 C-D).

These few passionate words—words of beauty and pathos, and

<sup>15</sup> Incidentally, as E. Frank has pointed out, Hermodorus, a pupil of Plato's, carried on a trade in Platonic *logoi* in Sicily (*A.J.P.*, 61, 1940, p. 37, note 4).

<sup>16</sup> Morrow (p. 64) has drawn attention to this passage, in which the title of Dionysius' book is mentioned in a reference to all those who wrote treatises on the same subject (see below, p. 81). For *πρῶτα* and *ἄκρα* see below, note 72. *φύσις* here obviously means the object of philosophy (τὸ ὄν or τὰ ὄντα); thus Taylor *apud* Harward *ad* 341 d 7.

laden with meaning—make one thing clear immediately: despite the fact that the dialogues are current, Plato's "serious" views cannot be known to everyone and cannot be learned from others. For he has never dealt with them in any book, and one cannot compose a book on them. Dionysius and the other interpreters of Platonism, had they understood Plato, would not have attempted to set forth his teaching in writing.<sup>17)</sup> Moreover, it is impossible even for Plato to instruct a pupil in his serious studies. The last principles are not the object of discursive thought; no exposition of them can be given. A light is kindled in the soul. The latter assertion surely does not mean, as is often held, that "a light is kindled in one soul by the fire bursting from the other," namely, the Master. Although there can be some guidance, the student must brace himself to follow the pathway shown him; with the help of his teacher, and through his own effort, he goes on "until he has reached the goal; or is capable of discovering the truth without the aid of the instructor" (340 C); "men are able to discover the truth themselves with but little instruction" (341 E). The contention is that one can grasp the truth only through a non-discursive experience.<sup>18)</sup>

It is too early to ask what is implied by the view taken here of the understanding of the ultimate principles of philosophy, or whether it could be Plato's. In the philosophical digression proper, the letter has more to say about the impossibility of expressing in words the nature of existence, and judgment must be postponed

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<sup>17)</sup> Harward believes that Dionysius held "mistaken views"—which he conjectures to be hedonistic and materialistic—and was therefore rejected by Plato (pp. 26 f.). But the word παρακούσματα cannot convey the notion of falsity (p. 209; cf. Richards, *Platonica*, p. 281 and above, I, note 54).

<sup>18)</sup> Contrary to Taylor ("The analysis of ἐπιστήμη in Plato's Seventh Letter," *Philos. Stud.*, 1934, p. 202 [*Mind*, 21, 1911-12, 347-70]), who is followed by e.g. Bluck *ad* 341 C-D; Howald, *Die Briefe Platons*, p. 48. The passages Taylor quotes (*Republic*, VII, 518 B; *Phaedrus* 274-76; *Theaetetus*, 149-51) at most attest the general significance of teaching and conversation, or confirm that philosophical insight cannot be taught (*Republic*, 518 B). They tell nothing of the influence of the teacher's personality. Plato, to be sure, gives great weight to guidance through teaching (Friedländer, I<sup>2</sup>, pp. 72 f.; see also Epistle VII, 340 C). Yet not even in the *Phaedrus* is it said (contrary to Friedländer, p. 73) that the pupil, formed by the teacher, his lover, could reach the goal only through his mediation (see "Platonic Anonymity," *A.J.P.*, 83, 1962, pp. 9 f.). Knowledge cannot flow from one to the other (cf. *Symposium*, 175 D). (For συνουσία, cf. *Republic*, VI, 493 B; *Politicus*, 285 C; for συζῆν, *Politicus*, 302 B; for πρᾶγμα, see below, note 72.)

until this later discussion has been analyzed. <sup>19)</sup> It will first of all be necessary to find out how far the interdiction against writing extends, what exactly is meant by it. The letter itself continues with a consideration of Plato's thoughts on writing in general, and what is said here will, I think, make it possible to clarify the issue.

Plato, it is said, would surely have been better able to write or speak about the ultimate principles of nature than anyone else; no one would be more pained by their misrepresentation than he (D). <sup>20)</sup> However, had he thought "that these subjects ought to be fully (ἱκανῶς) stated in writing or in speech to the public (τοὺς πολλοὺς), what nobler action could I have performed in my life than that of writing what is of great benefit to mankind and bringing to the sight of all men the nature of things (τὴν φύσιν εἰς φῶς πᾶσιν προαγγεῖν [341 D])? But were I to undertake this task it would not, as I think, prove to be of any good for men, except for some few who are able anyhow to discover the truth themselves with but little instruction; for as to the rest, some it would most unreasonably fill with a mistaken contempt, and others with an overweening and empty aspiration, as though they had learned something sublime" (E). <sup>21)</sup>

The sentences just quoted have been differently interpreted. Some interpreters take it that they constitute "Plato's apology for giving to the public of his time only 'discoveries of Socrates' and not an exposition of his own philosophy." <sup>22)</sup> But disregarding the question of whether the Platonic dialogues are in fact representations of Socrates, and perhaps, in addition, of other philosophers, and do not contain his own views, the letter itself seems innocent of such an assumption. It does not disown Plato's writings; it merely contends that certain aspects of Plato's philosophy have not been written about by him and explains Plato's decision

<sup>19)</sup> Cf. below, p. 81 ff.

<sup>20)</sup> The haughtiness with which Plato speaks here is reminiscent of his representation in the narrative; cf. above, p. 50.

<sup>21)</sup> The first words of the quotation, which I have given as translated by Bury, are often misunderstood. Bluck translates: "If . . . they could be adequately explained to the masses"; Harward: "If they had appeared to me to admit adequately of writing." But Bury's rendering of γραπτέα surely is correct (see also Howald, who rightly, I think, reads in the following ῥητέα instead of ῥητέα [compare the *apparatus criticus* in Burnet's edition, 341 d 5]). The last words of the passage quoted seem to be an echo of such passages as *Philebus*, 15 E and *Republic*, VII, 539 B.

<sup>22)</sup> Thus Taylor *apud* Harward, p. 200.

not to do so.<sup>23)</sup> Other interpreters assert that Plato here admits to having a secret doctrine. But if there is such a doctrine, that is, one not published, it is secret not because Plato wishes to withhold the truth from others, but rather because he is afraid that its publication would either do harm or be useless.<sup>24)</sup> In these circumstances, one can only take at face value the claim made, determine its bearing on the question of writing, and inquire whether it could be Platonic.

To start from what is obvious, the fact that the ultimate understanding of the fundamental principles flares up like a light surely does not mean that one cannot write or say anything at all about the subject. Though knowledge of this kind is non-discursive, argumentation about the topic is possible. One can at least point out that the truth cannot be put into words. Moreover, as the philosophical digression proper shows, one can also set forth "a certain argument which confronts the man who ventures to write anything at all on these matters" (342 A). The epistemological problem, as it were, that is posed when one attempts to understand the highest and first truth of nature, can be expressed in words, and Plato has done so often (*ibid.*).<sup>25)</sup> Granted that Plato could not have written, or even spoken, about the ultimate truth itself, the difficulty with which the writer of the letter is faced is that this assertion is not found in any of the dialogues. Plato has not even stated what he could have stated in the dialogues, addressed to all men, as well as in the letter, namely, the reasons for being silent, and the reasons for the impossibility of writing or speaking. Plato, the author claims, believed one ought not to do so.

Furthermore, when he proposes that Plato did not write about these matters because he considered it superfluous as far as the few qualified people are concerned and dangerous as regards the rest, the writer is touching on what for him is an important theme. At the end of the philosophical digression, he says "of Dionysius or

<sup>23)</sup> On Taylor's theory in general, see H. F. Cherniss, *The Riddle of the Early Academy*, pp. 9 f.; 11.

<sup>24)</sup> A secret doctrine has been assumed by Boas, *Philos. Review*, 1953, p. 87. Zeller thinks that the letter transfers to Plato the Pythagorean secrecy (II, 1<sup>4</sup>, p. 486 and note 1). Long before, W. C. Tenneman (*Gesch. d. Philos.*, II, 1799) spoke of a "geheime Philosophie" of Plato (p. 205); see also F. Ast (*Plato's Leben u. Schriften*, 1816), "esoteric wisdom" (p. 521).

<sup>25)</sup> On this interpretation there is no inconsistency between the statement made in 341 C and the exposé given in 342 A ff. (contrary to Boas, *Philos. Review*, 1948, p. 456; also 1953, p. 87).

any lesser or greater man who has written something about the highest and first truths of Nature" that if they had truly understood the teachings of philosophy, "they would not have dared to expose them to unseemly and degrading treatment" (344 D). And since they could not possibly have meant their books as "aids to memory"—one cannot forget the truth once one has grasped it—"they can have written only in order to gratify [their] base love of glory (φιλοτιμία), either by giving out the doctrines as [their] own discoveries, or else by showing, forsooth, that [they] shared a culture which [they] by no means deserved because of their lust for the gain accruing from its possession" (344 E).<sup>26</sup> He is sure that "every serious man in dealing with really (ὄντως) serious subjects carefully avoids writing, lest thereby he may possibly cast them as a prey to the envy and stupidity of the public" (ἐν ἀνθρώποις εἰς φθόνον καὶ ἀπορίαν, 344 C). It is clear, then, that he means what he says in explanation of Plato's attitude toward writing.

But can one believe that the Plato of the dialogues imposed silence upon himself because he was convinced that he could not really benefit the few who understand, and because he was afraid to harm the many who cannot, that is, the majority of mankind? Surely, the reader of his works must wonder that their author should have had doubts about writing for men of understanding. As the Platonic conversations take place among people of intellect and culture, so they appeal to people willing to reason and to follow arguments. And nowhere does Plato betray a fear such as is expressed in the letter that the truth can be harmful to the multitude. He does hold that not everyone can become a philosopher. "The thyrsus-bearers are many, but the mystics few" (*Phaedo*, 69 C). He contends that "philosophy, the love of wisdom, is impossible for the multitude" (*Republic*, VI, 493 E-94 A). But, first of all, even "among the great mass of men (ἐν τοῖς πολλοῖς) there are always, in fact, some, though few, of a superhuman quality; they are to be found in States with defective laws no less than in States with good, and their society is priceless" (*Laws*, XII, 951 B). Furthermore, he asks the philosopher "not thus absolutely [to] condemn the multitude" (τοὺς πολλοὺς, *Republic*, VI, 499 E). They are open to instruction if one speaks to them "in no spirit of contention but soothingly and endeavoring to do away with the dispraise of learn-

<sup>26</sup>) For Dionysius' φιλοδοξία, see above, p. 40.

ing" (*ibid.*; cf. 500 A-B). And when Socrates wants to make clear that one must not despair of reasoning because some arguments have turned out to be wrong, and for this purpose compares arguments with men, he holds with regard to both that few are either very good or very bad, while "those between the two are very many" (*Phaedo*, 88 A-90 A). One must therefore beware of becoming either a "misologist" or a "misanthropist" (89 D). The author of the letter is more exclusive than is Plato.<sup>27)</sup>

That the author takes such an attitude one can well understand. He must, as I said, explain why what he was to tell is not found in Plato's writings—and that this is so has by now been shown—though he has failed, or not even tried, to account for the fact that in the letter addressed to Dion's followers, Plato states what he has withheld from the readers of his dialogues. Yet it is puzzling that he goes even further and gives a characterization of all written works, and thus implicitly of Plato's works, which is most unplatonic. "In one word," he contends, "whenever one sees a man's written compositions—whether they be the laws of a legislator or anything else in any other form (ἐν ἄλλοις τισὶν ἄττ' οὖν)—these are not his most serious works, if so be that the writer himself is serious; rather, those works abide in the fairest region he possesses [his mind]. If, however, these really (ὄντως) are his serious efforts, and put into writing, 'Then truly, not the gods, but mortal men themselves have utterly ruined his senses' " (344 C-D).

I am aware of the fact that most interpreters will not admit that the verdict just quoted is unplatonic. They maintain that it is fundamentally the same indictment of writing which Plato himself pronounces in the *Phaedrus*.<sup>28)</sup> But in the *Phaedrus*, Plato rejects the written word because, unlike the spoken one, it cannot answer

<sup>27)</sup> Cf. below, pp. 92 ff.; and for the author's exclusiveness in philosophical and political matters, below, p. 109.

<sup>28)</sup> Cf. e.g. Friedländer, I<sup>2</sup>, pp. 120 f. A few interpreters see an agreement between the letter and other passages. Thus Bury refers to *Laws*, VI, 769 A and *Politicus*, 294 A. But the former passage speaks of the contrast between σπουδή and παιδιὰ—a concept missing in the epistle (see note 30)—and the latter, while it does maintain that the true artist cannot be bound by books because they give fixed rules for human behavior, is not at all concerned with whether one should write. It does, in fact, insist on rulership in agreement with the written word. According to Souilhé, all that is meant in the letter is that such dialogues as the *Laws* and the *Philebus* deal merely with isolated questions in an unsystematic fashion and do not treat them fully. But the contention that the written works are not serious surely implies more than that.



questions (275 D-E), while "the word which is written with intelligence in the mind of the learner" is able to defend itself, to speak and to be silent (276 A). Moreover, if the philosopher does write, even despite the shortcomings of the written word, his books may not deserve "to be treated very seriously" (μεγάλης ἄξιον σπουδῆς [277 E]), for clearness and perfection and seriousness are written only in the soul (278 A). Nevertheless, the philosopher does write—and not only because books are "reminders" (ὑπομνήματα) for himself when he comes to the forgetfulness of old age and for others who follow the same path; he will also "be pleased when he sees them putting forth tender leaves" (276 D). To put it differently, books, though inferior to the spoken word, have for Plato a certain significance; and in so far as they are not written "in earnest" (267 C), they are written for the sake of "amusement" — a "pleasure" or "pastime" (παιδιᾶς χάριν [276 D]). They are works of play in the sense in which life is a play (*Laws*, VII, 803 E), in the sense in which the cosmology of the *Timaeus* is written "for the sake of recreation," for the sake of "a pleasure not to be repented of," for the sake of "a pastime that is both moderate and sensible" (59 C-D). <sup>29)</sup>

The *Phaedrus*, then, devaluates writing merely in contrast with speaking, conversing or teaching. It says nothing about the impossibility of expressing in words the last truths of Nature; nor does it condemn writing, as does the epistle, on the basis of its usefulness or uselessness for the few or the many. Moreover, the *Phaedrus* sees in writing a pleasure or pastime which the epistle fails to mention; it considers that books, though they do not deserve to be treated with "great" seriousness, are nevertheless of serious import, while the letter goes so far as to deny that they can contain one's "truly serious" thoughts. In short, the doctrine of the *Phaedrus* differs significantly from that of the letter. <sup>30)</sup>

<sup>29)</sup> On the concept of παιδιᾶ, see L. Edelstein, "The Function of the Myth in Plato's Philosophy," *J.H.I.*, 10, 1949, pp. 470 f. Friedländer (I<sup>2</sup>, p. 125) in my opinion minimizes the importance attributed to writing in the *Phaedrus*, and therefore the contrast between the statement made in the dialogue and that made in the letter (above, note 28); cf. Misch, *op. cit.*, I, 1<sup>2</sup>, p. 148.

<sup>30)</sup> Müller (pp. 264 f.) has noted that the concept of play, or pastime, so prominent in the *Phaedrus*, is missing in the letter. Of course, the *Phaedrus* is the basis for the discussion of writing in the Seventh Letter, but the author, as usual, takes a one-sided view of the problem, while Plato does justice to its complexity. On the relation between the *Phaedrus* and the Seventh Letter, see Zeller, II, 1<sup>4</sup>, p. 485, note 1, and G. Vlastos, *Gnomon*, 35, 1963, pp. 652 f.

Undoubtedly, however, the passages in the *Phaedrus* raise a real problem. They make it hard to understand that Plato, holding the beliefs he propounds there, should have bothered to write at all. Or, as some ancient commentators put it, it is a "puzzle" (ἀπορία) that he wrote down his own views, and did not leave behind him pupils only, as did Socrates and Pythagoras (*Prolegomena to Plato's philosophy*, chap. 13, VI, p. 207 [Hermann]). Their solution was that in this respect, as in others, he was imitating the divine, and chose the greater good over the smaller evil. For just as God made some of the things he created invisible—all the immaterial bodies, the souls and so forth—and made some of the things perceptible—the heavenly bodies, that which comes into being and passes away—so Plato, too, transmitted some things in writing, others he left unwritten, and not subject to perception, in the manner of immaterial bodies, namely, all that was said in the school—or what according to Aristotle was contained in the unwritten conversations of Plato (cf. Aristotle, *Physics*, IV, 11, 209 b 15).<sup>31</sup>

The truth is, I think, that Plato was divinely unconcerned with the inconsistency which troubled his expositors. He wrote books though he was aware of their shortcomings as written and defenseless arguments, and never claimed that in his teaching he gave something other than what was in his writings.<sup>32</sup> But the author of the epistle may well have seen the *aporia* as did the commentators, though he does not, to be sure, solve it in the same way. At any rate, like the later Platonists, he certainly believes that Plato did express opinions in the Academy, that he had some kind of oral exposition to offer, as he makes clear when he expounds the argument against writing (342 A). And when he says that in books on laws or on whatever other subject, one cannot find the "serious" thoughts of a "serious" writer, that these thoughts abide in the mind, he devaluates the published works and arrogates the right

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(Two points of agreement between the *Phaedrus* and the letter may be noted: Books are justified if they are intended as aids to memory, though according to the letter, this does not apply to the last principles of the truth [344 D]; the fault of any written formulation is that it is unalterable [343 A].)

<sup>31</sup>) I owe my knowledge of the passage in the *Prolegomena* to Friedländer, I<sup>2</sup>, p. 131 and note 26.

<sup>32</sup>) Zeller has rightly emphasized the fact that authors such as Aristotle unhesitatingly take the Platonic dialogues as the basis for their discussion of Plato's philosophy, and that they must therefore contain his "serious" teaching (II, 1<sup>4</sup>, p. 486). See in general, Cherniss, *The Riddle of the Early Academy*, pp. 11 ff.

to go beyond them or to add to them. Thus he has freed himself from any bondage to the dialogues; even where he violates their letter or their spirit, he cannot be refuted by reference to them. For he can always take refuge in the claim that he is stating what Plato thought or said.<sup>33)</sup>

I doubt that Plato wanted his writings to be taken with such freedom. He was accused in antiquity of having employed "a variety of terms in order to make his system less intelligible to the ignorant" (Diogenes Laertius, III, 63); he was accused of speaking in riddles (Aristotle, Fr. 28 [Rose]). But he was never charged with deliberate deception, of which he would be guilty had he written down only what he himself did not regard as really serious and never hinted that he was doing this. The verdict, then, must be that as the author of the letter has "invented" the story of the test, so he has "invented" Plato's rejection of serious writing, of withholding the truth from the public.

### 3. THE DOCTRINE OF THE FIFTH

The philosophical digression proper—to which the account of the test and Plato's writings is prefatory—is itself introduced by the remark that a more lengthy discussion of these studies will perhaps make clearer "the subject with which I am dealing" (342 A). As is obvious from the sentences immediately following, it is the author's intention to explain in greater detail why it is impossible to write on the first and highest truths of Nature.<sup>34)</sup> The "argument" (λόγος ἀληθής) to be given, he adds, "has been frequently stated in the past" but "it seems to require statement also at the present time" (*ibid.*). In his opinion, then, one is not about to learn anything Plato has never said before—though he has never written

<sup>33)</sup> The letter never states in positive terms what the dialogues are meant to be if they are not "really serious." Perhaps the author, impressed by their usually negative outcome, took them to be merely a kind of propaedeutics to philosophy (cf. the *Cleitophon*, which shows that Socrates' teaching is at most protreptic). For him, then, the dialogues, though not "really serious" nor playful in the Platonic sense of the word, are not altogether without value.

<sup>34)</sup> The language here, as before (cf. 341 C), is vague. A literal translation would be: "But concerning these things (περί αὐτῶν) I am minded to speak still more at length since that about which I talk (περί ὧν λέγω) will perhaps become clearer . . ." But the context leaves no doubt as to what he intends to speak about. (That the statement does not contradict what has been said earlier I have shown [note 25].)

about it. But if he gives the impression that in his report he reproduces Plato's oral teaching, it is in fact true that at least the first part of the argument (342 A-343 A) bears an unmistakable resemblance to what is said in the Platonic dialogues.

The author begins with the assertion that with regard to "everything that exists" (342 A), there are "three" things which bring about knowledge (ἐπιστήμη)—name (ὄνομα), definition (λόγος), and image or sensual representation (εἰδωλον), all of which differ greatly from "the object itself [the Idea], which is recognizable and true" (αὐτὸ . . . ὃ δὴ γνωστόν τε καὶ ἀληθές ἐστι).<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) and intelligence (νοῦς) and true opinion (ἀληθείης δόξα) form a single whole, a "fourth" thing concerned with the first three (C). It is not "vocal utterance"; it exists not in bodily forms but in "souls" (ἐν ψυχαῖς), and as such, differs again from the three as well as from the object itself, though "intelligence" approaches "most nearly in kinship and similarity to the fifth [the Idea] and the rest are further removed" (C-D). This contention holds true for things mathematical, qualities, the good and the beautiful, artifacts, organisms, moral actions and passions (D). Finally, unless these "four" are in some way grasped, knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) of the "fifth" cannot be achieved "completely" (τελέως). "Owing to the weakness of language," they express the "quality of each object" (τὸ ποῖόν τι), as much as its "real essence" (τὸ ὄν)—and not this essence all by itself—"and for this reason, no man of intelligence will ever venture to commit to [language] what he is thinking (τὰ νηνοημένα), especially when it is unalterable as is the case with what is formulated in writing" (E-343 A).<sup>36</sup>

Even disregarding the last assertion, there are in this short statement a few terminological deviations from the language of the Plato of the dialogues. Whereas the letter calls the Idea, if not the "itself," the "fifth" (342 A; C; 343 A; D), Plato nowhere speaks of it as the fifth. The distinction between "the quality" of each object and its "essence" is Aristotelian rather than Platonic.<sup>37</sup> However, Plato

<sup>35</sup> The letter illustrates "what applies to all (things)" by the example of the circle (cf. *Parmenides*, 137 E; *Philebus*, 62 A). In the text, I have stated the function of name, definition and sensual representation in general terms.

<sup>36</sup> This conclusion is unplatonic (cf. above, note 30). Bury translates τὰ νηνοημένα as "concepts of his reason" (Bluck: "intuited notions"). Howald's "das von ihm Gedachte" is more literal and closer to the author's meaning, I think (below, note 64). For "the weakness of language," Bury compares *Cratylus*, 438 D-E.

does set apart name, definition and essence (*Laws*, X, 895 D; cf. *Parmenides*, 142 A). The sensual representation, the *eidolon*, is characterized by him in a similar way (e.g. *Republic*, VII, 534 C).<sup>37</sup> As for the two kinds of knowledge, the *Parmenides* distinguishes between the knowledge of things as they appear, and of the things themselves (134 A-B). There, too, Plato does not assign a specific significance to the Idea of the Good or of the Beautiful and rather, like the letter, ranges goodness and beauty indiscriminately among all the other Ideas (134 B-C).<sup>38</sup> Moreover, in the same dialogue he implies that one must, as the epistle claims, assume Ideas of everything, mathematical bodies, organisms and so forth, even of "trivial and undignified objects" such as hair or mud or dirt, in addition to Ideas of righteousness and beauty and goodness (130 B). Not to do so is simply a sign of youthful inexperience in philosophy (E).<sup>39</sup> It is true, the parallels adduced are taken from different dialogues. It is not always certain that the letter interprets the terms in question exactly as Plato wants them to be interpreted, and no passage is as systematic as the letter. But though Plato never enumerates in so schoolmasterly a fashion the various factors involved in the process of understanding, he does in substance say what the letter has him say.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>37</sup> As regards τὸ ὄν καὶ τὸ ποῖον, see Boas, *Philos. Rev.*, 1948, p. 456. (For the bearing this has on the question of genuineness, see below, p. 114.) In Plato, the fifth has significance only as the fifth body, that is, the dodecahedron (*Timaeus*, 55 C); cf. *R.E.* XXI, s.v. *quinta essentia*, col. 1184, 62 ff. Though the author's enumeration of one through five may be inspired by the five bodies, he seems to have more specific reasons for choosing numbers (see below, p. 103).

<sup>38</sup> As Shorey points out (*ad loc.*), this passage may have been one of the sources for the letter. Concerning the εἰδῶλα, see also VII, 532 B and the parallels Shorey adduces. As in the letter, λόγος is ranked above ὄνομα in the *Sophist*, 218 C. For knowledge and true judgment or opinion, see *Theaetetus*, 187 A ff.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Friedländer, III<sup>2</sup>, p. 179. (But in I<sup>2</sup>, p. 66, he seems to consider it a unique feature of the letter that the Idea of the Good is put on the same level with the other Ideas.) Two kinds of knowledge are distinguished, *Philebus*, 61 D-E. In *Parmenides*, 134 C, knowledge itself is called ἀκριβέστερον than our knowledge, and the knowledge most likely possessed by the gods is called ἀκριβεστάτην (D). This distinction seems to be the model of the "full" knowledge mentioned in the letter, which, as the analysis will show, often agrees with the *Parmenides*.

<sup>40</sup> While the letter follows the *Parmenides* in accepting Ideas of artifacts, Aristotle denies that Plato acknowledged them (cf. Zeller, II, 1<sup>4</sup>, p. 703).

<sup>41</sup> At least as far as the distinction of the five is concerned. For their interrelation, see below, pp. 90 ff.

More significant still, the difficulty itself which the letter sets forth (342 B ff.)—namely, that neither name nor definition nor image nor intellect give adequate knowledge of the Idea—recalls “the worst difficulty” pointed out in the *Parmenides* (133 B), which provides so many parallels to statements in the letter. It is impossible to know the Ideas, for they do not exist in our world (133 C) and have their being “with reference to one another,” not “with reference to those likenesses (ὁμοιώματα)—or whatever we are to call them—in our world, which we possess and so come to be called by their several names” (ὀνομάζεται, D). And yet knowing itself, “the essence of knowledge” (αὐτὴ μὲν ὁ ἔστι ἐπιστήμη), is knowledge of Ideas. Any given branch of knowledge that exists among us (ἡ δὲ παρὰ ἡμῖν ἐπιστήμη) is merely knowledge of some department of things that exist in our world (134 A-B). And since we do not possess the Ideas themselves, since the Ideas also do not exist in our world and can be known only by “the Idea of knowledge” (τοῦ εἶδους τοῦ τῆς ἐπιστήμης), we do not know the Ideas, for we have no part in knowledge itself. As Plato summarizes the outcome of his whole argument in the first hypothesis of the *Parmenides*, “it (i.e. the One or the Idea) cannot have a name or be spoken of, nor can there be any knowledge or perception or opinion of it. It is not named or spoken of, not an object of opinion or of knowledge, not perceived by any creature” (142 A). Proclus was quite right when, in order to elucidate this summary, he quoted, in his commentary on the *Parmenides*, the passage from the Seventh Letter just analyzed, which calls the Idea the Fifth perhaps because merely to number a thing is not to name it or to pretend to know it.<sup>42)</sup>

But to continue with the analysis of the “argument,” the difficulty, so far stated only in general terms, is now explained in more detail (343 A-D). It is shown first, again with reference to the example of the circle, why the sensual representation of it can never be adequate. Names are never fixed, and definitions are not fixed either (A-B). Moreover, with each of the Four their inaccuracy is an “endless topic.” But the main point is that they always present to the soul not what it seeks, the “essence” (τὸ ὄν), but rather the

<sup>42)</sup> Cf. the fragment edited by R. Klibansky, “Ein Proklosfund und seine Bedeutung,” *S.B. Heidelberg, Phil. Hist. Klasse*, 5, 1928-9, p. 37. (I take it, however, that the first hypothesis argues about the Ideas and not, as the Neoplatonists maintained, about the transcendental One [Cf. F. ornford, *Plato and Parmenides*, 1950<sup>2</sup>, pp. 131 f. ])

"quality" (τὸ ποῖον); each object described is easily refuted by the senses; therefore, perplexity and uncertainty result in the mind of the investigator (B-D). One can, however, counteract this confusion, and refute the adversary, by an analysis of the shortcomings of "the Four" as long as men are satisfied with "images" and do not seek true Being.

There seems to be no exact parallel to this discussion in the Platonic dialogues. But its tenor and outcome are not unplatonic. The dialogues, too, take it for granted that mathematical figures do not fully correspond to mathematical concepts (*Republic*, VII, 527 A). They declare that names as well as definitions are not fixed or stable (*Cratylus*, 384 B-E; *Theaetetus*, 208 A ff.). <sup>43</sup>) That the refutation of "the Four" is brought about "by the senses" (343 C) is Protagoras' argument against the possibility of knowing (Fr. 7 [Diels-Kranz]). But Plato would not deny that such an argument can be made. The difficulty of "the one and the many" is often taken up in the dialogues. He only insists that it can be refuted. As he puts it in the *Philebus*, "these wonders. . . are common property, and almost everybody is agreed that they should be disregarded because they are childish and easy and great hindrances to speculation" (14 D). <sup>44</sup>)

So far, then, the author has said more or less what Plato could have said, though perhaps not in exactly the same language. But when he comes to restate the worst difficulty itself, a fundamental disagreement between the letter and the dialogues appears, I believe. Whenever the "Fifth" is at stake, he says, the situation is different from what it is in the case of the Four. Here, the opponent gains the day and makes us seem ignorant of the subject, whether we are talking or writing. And those who argue against our answer are sometimes ignorant of the fact "that it is not the soul of the

<sup>43</sup>) *Theaetetus*, 206 D, also is usually quoted in the commentaries. *Sophist*, 262 E ff., like the letter, makes the definition consist of noun and verb (cf. W. G. Runciman, *Plato's Later Epistemology*, 1963, p. 33, note 3).

<sup>44</sup>) In a letter, Erich Frank compares, in addition, Protagoras Fr. 3 and 4, and quotes Plato's *Sophist*, 207, and Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, 1064 b 27, 1061 b 8, 1062 b 13, as setting forth the eristic or Sophistic dialectic, concerned not with the essential, but with accidental aspects of things. That the letter follows Protagoras has been noted by Wilamowitz, *Platon*, II, p. 293 (Novotny *ad* 343 a 5). The passages I quoted seem to me more pertinent than *Republic*, VII, 507 D (the simile of the cave), referred to by Souilhé and Harward (*ad* 343 D 2).

writer or the speaker that is being refuted, but the nature of the Four, which is essentially defective" (D).

Now in the *Parmenides*, too, it is admitted that once the difficulties involved in the assumption of Ideas have been outlined, "the hearer is perplexed and inclined either to question their existence or to contend that if they do exist, they must certainly be unknowable by our human nature" (135 A). Moreover, "there seems to be some weight in these objections." But far from maintaining that "anyone who is able and willing to upset the argument gains the day," as the letter does (343 D), the *Parmenides* merely claims that "as we were saying, it is extraordinarily difficult to convert the objector" (*ibid.*). For there are arguments that can be used against him, though they are hard to follow (133 B). <sup>45</sup> Such confidence is missing in the letter. And if the author of the letter says that "it is not the soul of the writer or speaker that is being refuted, but the nature of the Four"—despite the fact that he has no convincing argument to proffer—Socrates asserts in the *Theaetetus*: "when a man gets hold of the true notion of something without an account, his mind thinks truly of it but he does not know it; for if one cannot give and receive an account of a thing one has no knowledge of that thing" (202 C-D). <sup>46</sup>

The letter's statement of the *aporia* of the *Parmenides*, then, ends on an unplatonic note. But were the letter to conclude its exposition at this point—as it should, for it was to give merely "an argument which confronts the man who ventures to write anything at all of these matters" (342 A)—it would still be true that its author has shown no knowledge of Plato's teaching which he could not have gathered from the dialogues. He would merely have come to a conclusion which is more sceptical than that at which Plato arrives. Quite unexpectedly, the letter now attempts to solve the worst difficulty, and it does so, I think, in a manner foreign to Plato's way of thinking, in a manner to which the dialogues provide no parallels.

In order to gain knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), it is first of all suggested (343 D-E) that one study all the Four, "passing in turn from one

<sup>45</sup> The *Philebus* says of the difficulties that exist for him who believes in the existence of Ideas that "they cause the utmost perplexity if ill solved (μὴ καλῶς), and are, if well (καλῶς) solved, of the greatest assistance" (15 B).

<sup>46</sup> The Plato of the letter would, of course, not admit this assertion of Socrates. His confidence in acquiring knowledge of the Ideas has a basis other than rational argumentation (below, p. 105).



to another, up and down." Such a study is called "taking a person through a subject by instruction" (διαγωγή). The latter term does not occur in the Platonic writings.<sup>47)</sup> It can hardly be a truly methodical approach since no more is said of the procedure than that it implies "passing in turn from one to another, up and down". As has been said earlier, knowledge of the Fifth can be gained only when the Four are grasped "in some way" (ἄμῳς γέ πως [342 E]). According to a later description, one must "rub" (τριβόμενα) "each of these objects against one another—names and definitions, visions and sense perceptions" and refute them "through kindly refutations and by questions and answers that are void of envy" (344 B). Again, nothing indicates a special order in which this process of rubbing is to take place.<sup>48)</sup> Certainly, it is hard to imagine that "the instruction" resembles the method of Platonic dialectic—a term that the letter avoids as it avoids the term Idea. For dialectics leads man upwards without the aid of visual images, proving all hypotheses to be mere hypotheses; it proceeds step by step, after the philosopher has gone through the preliminary training of the mathematical sciences, a training of which the letter has nothing at all to tell. It would seem, then, that whatever the exact meaning of the instruction, it is not the instruction given by Platonic dialectic.<sup>49)</sup>

<sup>47)</sup> See Novotny *ad* 343 e 1. Nearest to the term διαγωγή, which I have translated in the conventional way so as not to prejudice the meaning, is perhaps the διεξόδου καὶ πλάνης of the *Parmenides* (136 E); compare also *Republic*, VII, 534 D: διὰ πάντων ἐλέγχων διεξιῶν. These passages, as Novotny remarks, may have induced the writer to use the term in question.

<sup>48)</sup> Friedländer speaks of "Stufen" and of "Führung" (I<sup>2</sup>, pp. 68; 70; 72); see also Stenzel (p. 168), who contends that if there were no such systematic procedure, the teaching would be sceptical. But all that the letter says is that the rubbing process must be undertaken diligently and for a long time (344 B) and that one should turn from one stage to another, "up and down" (343 E), perhaps an echo of *Republic* VI, 511 B. Even if one were to read, with Friedländer (I<sup>2</sup>, p. 354, note 3), ἄλλῳς γέ πως instead of ἄμῳς γέ πως, there would be no indication of a particular order to the process. At most, one might say with Howald that in the letter the act of understanding is divided into a propaedeutic event (the rubbing of the Four) and the final event of the light's bursting forth (p. 44); see also below, p. 104.

<sup>49)</sup> E. Frank, "The Fundamental Opposition of Plato and Aristotle," *A.J.P.*, 61, 1940, pp. 38-40. Frank identifies the teaching of the Seventh Letter with Plato's dialectic as presented in the *Republic*, the *Symposium* and the later dialogues. But as I have tried to show, the letter is silent about mathematical studies, and in the *Republic*, at any rate, dialectic dissociates itself from the use of images (VI, 510 B ff.; VII, 531 D ff.). Even the *Politicus* states that for the highest and most important class of existents there are no corresponding visible resemblances (285 E) and that these existents are

However, more than philosophical instruction is needed in order to reach the goal. In addition, the personal qualities of the student are of decisive significance (343 E-344 B). The study "with difficulty implants knowledge, when the man himself, like his object, is of a fine nature (εὖ πεφυκός εὔ πεφυκότη); but if his nature is bad—and, in fact, the condition of most men's souls in respect of learning and of what are termed "morals" is either naturally bad or else corrupted,—then not even Lynceus himself could make such folk see. In one word, neither receptivity nor memory will ever produce knowledge in him who has no affinity with the object (συγγενῇ τοῦ πράγματος), since it does not germinate to start with in alien states of mind (ἐν ἀλλοτρίαις ἔξεσιν); consequently, neither those who have no natural connexion or affinity (μὴ προσφύεις . . . καὶ συγγενεῖς) with things just, and all else that is fair, although they are both receptive and retentive in various ways of other things, nor yet those who possess such affinity (συγγενεῖς) but are unreceptive and unretentive—none, I say, of these will ever learn to the utmost possible extent the truth of virtue nor yet of vice" (344 A).

Now such an assertion may, at first blush, read like the re-statement of an opinion proffered repeatedly in the dialogues.<sup>50</sup>) It is Plato's conviction that man reaches the truth, true reality, through that part of the soul which is "akin to it" (συγγενεῖ, *Republic*, VI, 490 B). A good memory and doggedness are among the many qualities that the student of philosophy must possess by nature (VII, 535 A ff.). It is also Plato's belief that not everyone will become a philosopher.<sup>51</sup>) There is, however, one point on which the two differ decisively. For the author of the letter there are those whose state of mind is "alien" to the truth, while others are of a "fine nature" like the object itself. And knowledge is accessible only to those privileged few, who are set apart from the rest. According to the dialogues, no one is "alien" to the truth or unlike it in nature.<sup>52</sup>)

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demonstrable only by reason (286 A). Stenzel finds the teaching of the letter in agreement with the development of Plato's later philosophy in the direction of Aristotle (p. 168); on his theory, see below, note 65.

<sup>50</sup>) Müller's claim that the demand for a knowledge of virtue and vice indicates the non-Platonic origin of the letter has been refuted by B. Stenzel, *A.J.P.*, 1953, p. 391. For τὰ λεγόμενα ἡθῆ (343 E-344 A), compare *Phaedo*, 82 A-B; *Republic*, VI, 518 D; for knowledge of the true and the false (344 B) compare *Theaetetus*, 187 C ff.; 196 B.

<sup>51</sup>) Cf. above, p. 81, and also *Republic*, V, 476 B.

<sup>52</sup>) H. Patzer ("Mitteilbarkeit der Erkenntnis und Philosophenregiment im

For the eye "that could not be converted to the light from the darkness except by turning the whole body" (*Republic*, VII, 518 C), is native to "the soul of everyone" (ἐκάστου . . . ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ). "There is in every soul (ἐκάστου—ψυχῆς) an organ or instrument of knowledge"; it must only be "purified and kindled afresh" by studies "when it has been destroyed and blinded by our ordinary pursuits, a faculty whose preservation outweighs ten thousand eyes: for by it only is reality beheld" (527 D-E; cf. 518 D). Through its "conversion" it becomes useful and beneficent; without it, it is useless and harmful (519 A ff.). Not that the vision of the soul is equally strong in all men. Though every human soul has once seen the Ideas—otherwise it could not have entered the human body (*Phaedrus*, 249 B)—it is not easy for all souls to gain from earthly things the recollection of "those realities" they saw before incarnation; few are left "which retain an adequate recollection of them" (249 E-250 A). Yet reason is the birthright of all men (249 E); the soul of the lover of wisdom, of beauty, of music and of eros is but the soul "that has seen most" (τὴν . . . πλείστα ἰδοῦσαν [248 D]). The fundamental differences existing between souls is so to say quantitative rather than qualitative. The greatest of philosophers shares the possession of the instrument of knowledge with the most humble of his fellow men. What distinguishes him from others is that he is able to make better use of the instrument, not that he has what they have not. Insight is gained by the few in whom common human nature is perfected.<sup>53</sup>) Unlike the author of the letter, Plato

7. Platobrief," *Arch. f. Philosophie*, V, 1954, p. 25) has noted the contrast between the teaching of the *Republic* and that of the letter (see also Misch, I, 1, p. 150). Bluck, *ad* 343 C, refers back to 340 C (οἰκείος τε καὶ ἄξιος τοῦ πράγματος θεῖος ὢν), for which see below, note 70. Krüger (p. 255) compares the expression "the well-grown soul" to the "pure soul" of the *Phaedo* (66 A; 67 B [cf. p. 249]). But this "pure soul" is the common human soul purified of those elements which obstruct knowledge, while the letter thinks of a faculty of the soul not possessed by everyone.

<sup>53</sup>) H. Cherniss reminds me that *Timaeus*, 51 E (" . . . of reason only the gods and but a small class of men [partake]") might be construed as contradicting my interpretation of Plato if one does not remember that *nous* is here not an organ or instrument, but the state of the knowing soul, i.e. the state in soul produced by sight of the Ideas, or "enlightened soul" (*Aristotle's Criticism of Plato*, I, p. 607). In other words, Plato speaks of the philosopher who has come to see the truth. (When in outlining the qualifications of the true philosopher [VI, 485 D ff.] Plato speaks of his being συγγενὴς ἀληθείας [487 A; cf. 486 D], he means to say merely that his nature must have measure and proportion. The *Parmenides* defines the word εὐφροσύνη, which Plato occasionally uses [e.g. *Symposium*, 209 B], as meaning versed in many things

is not an exclusivist. That is why to him "it is better for everyone to be governed by the divine and the intelligent." And it is preferable that it be by the divine "indwelling and his own." Only in default of that—"so that we all so far as possible may be akin and friendly because our governance and guidance are the same"—can it be imposed from without by the law, "which is the ally of all classes in the state" and which establishes, "so to speak, a constitutional government within them" and fosters "the best element in them with the aid of the like in ourselves" (*Republic*, IX, 590 A-591 A). <sup>54)</sup>

It would seem, then, that the philosophical digression, having posed a problem of Plato's, and having formulated it in his spirit, moves away from the Platonic position in the attempt to solve it. The question arises of whether the same is true when the letter gives its final resolution of the *aporia*. If one has the right qualifications and follows the right approach, it holds, then "by such means and hardly so (μόγισ) . . . there bursts out the light of intelligence and reason regarding each object for him who uses every effort he is capable of" (344 B). <sup>55)</sup>

Before asking what is meant by this statement, it will be well to compare it with the earlier passage on the last principles of Nature (341 C-D). There, too, the truth—not to be grasped by discursive thought—is likened to a light. Moreover, if according to the philosophical digression the light appears in the mind of him who makes the utmost effort at understanding, it has been said before that truth results from continued application to the subject itself and communion therewith, it is brought to birth in the soul. The light kindled by a spark on a sudden corresponds to the assertion now made that the light of intelligence and reason bursts forth. <sup>56)</sup> The

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and willing to follow through a long and remote train of argument and to examine thoroughly all difficulties [133 B].)

<sup>54)</sup> According to Patzer (*loc. cit.*), the letter is more pessimistic than the *Republic* in consequence of Plato's wider experience. But it is unlikely that Plato was disillusioned by his Sicilian adventure (cf. above, p. 68). Moreover, the passage I quoted from the *Republic* sets the framework for the *Laws*, on which Plato was working at the end of his life, and, as is clear from the other references adduced, the theory of the *Republic* is presupposed wherever the soul's relation to truth and the Ideas is discussed.

<sup>55)</sup> I have accepted the usual reading of the text (συντείνονται instead of συντείνων), proposed by E. Sachs. Müller (p. 258, note 18) considers the change unnecessary, but cf. 340 B (ξυντείνας αὐτόν).

<sup>56)</sup> According to Taylor, the two passages are not identical, but merely

philosophical digression adds only that what such an experience makes accessible is the Idea, which the letter calls the Fifth, or to be more accurate, that what is apprehended is not the Idea itself or the Idea of the Good or of the Beautiful, but the individual Ideas. The light of intelligence and reason reveals each object. This is indeed what one would expect, since the letter does not assign a special rank to any Idea, but places all of them on the same level.<sup>57)</sup>

To turn to the content of the sentences in question, the light revealing the ultimate principles of nature is, the letter says, "in the soul" (341 D); the light of intelligence and reason shows the Ideas to him who makes every possible effort (345 B). Moreover, this light is not only within the soul; it "is brought to birth in the soul" (341 C-D). Knowledge of the Fifth cannot be acquired without a grasp of the Four (342 D-E). That is, "the light bursts out" (344 B) as a result of rubbing the three—names, definitions, and images and sense perception—against one another, and testing them by kindly proofs. The cooperation of the four instruments, otherwise employed as tools for laying hold on the world of phenomena, produces an inner light in which the Ideas become apparent.<sup>58)</sup>

Again, on a first reading, this assertion does not sound unplatonic. For Plato too, there is a vision of the Idea of the Good which "enlightens" the soul.<sup>59)</sup> This inner light is kindled by a light outside. Reason could not be aware of the realm of Ideas without first establishing contact with it. The eye of the mind, which is sun-like by nature, is made capable of seeing by apprehending the sun and thus receiving light. As the *Republic* puts it, those who have reached

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linked (*op. cit.*, p. 218, note 1). But this contention is due to his in my opinion mistaken interpretation of 341 C-D (see above, note 18).

<sup>57)</sup> This is confirmed by the parallel afforded by the *Parmenides* (see below, p. 98). Stenzel, too, assumes that the Seventh Letter speaks of single Ideas (*Kl. Schrift.*, pp. 105 f.). Whether the expression τῆς ὅλης οὐσίας (344 B)—he who knows must know the whole Being—implies "the systematic unity of all Ideas" or the unity of every single Idea with the others (as Stenzel suggests) seems impossible to decide. Perhaps it is safest to say with Müller that the words in question signify the whole realm of Ideas (p. 259), made up of the single Ideas.

<sup>58)</sup> In 344 B, the Fourth is not expressly mentioned, but it is apparently the *logos* which does the "testing". The word "grasp" (λάβη, 342 E) denotes, I think, the mental activity which is called διαγωγή in 343 D. (For this sense of λαβεῖν see also 342 B and e.g. λόγον λαβεῖν, *Republic*, III, 402 A; see also Shorey *ad* VII, 531 E).

<sup>59)</sup> Cf. Cherniss, *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato and the Academy*, p. 607 (also above, note 53).

the goal "fix their gaze on that which sheds light (ἀποβλέψαι . . . φῶς) on all" (VII, 540 A) and thus become converted "from the shadows to the images that cause them and to the light" (532 B). Man knows when he "descries" (κατίδῃ) the Idea of the Beautiful (*Symposium*, 210 D) or "touches" (ἐφαπτομένῳ) it (212 A), when he "apprehends" (λάβῃ) by thought itself the nature of the Good in itself (*Republic*, VII, 532 B). This distinction between a There and a Here is firmly maintained and insisted upon throughout the dialogues. Since the Ideas reside in the Beyond (*Republic*, VI, 500 D; cf. 498 D), "the fitting pasture for the best part of the soul is the meadow there, and the wing on which the soul is raised up is nourished by this" (*Phaedrus*, 248 B-C). The philosopher, "so far as he is able, is in communion through memory with those things;" separating himself from human interests (ἐξιστάμενος), he turns his attention toward the divine (249 C-D). For Plato, the inner light is always dependent upon the light outside.<sup>60)</sup>

Is all this true of the letter too? Though it has much to tell about the process by which the inner light bursts forth, it does not speak at all of an interplay between the eye that sees and the object seen. Nor does it indicate in any way that there is another light from which the inner light arises. It does not even mention the word "There," just as it does not know of the word "dialectics" or the Platonic concept of dialectics, or of the propaedeutic study of mathematics—the two means which enable the Platonist to reach out to the Beyond. It would seem, then, that the light of which the author of the epistle speaks is merely an inner light.<sup>61)</sup>

But perhaps one will say that in so short an analysis of a complicated topic not every pertinent detail could be included, or even that the argument is characterized by a certain confusion of thought, an indistinctness one finds elsewhere in the letter. And yet, could it not be true that the epistle does not share Plato's

<sup>60)</sup> Cf. Friedländer, I<sup>1</sup>, pp. 82 ff.; especially 86 (and for more material, pp. 67 f.).

<sup>61)</sup> Stenzel, in interpreting *Republic*, VI, 505 A ff., also uses the expression "inneres Licht" (p. 161). Yet according to him, the "illumination" comes to man through his participation in the social community (p. 165); and he concludes from *Republic*, VI, 518 C, that education creates a new organ in the soul (*loc. cit.*). This is as unconvincing to me as the claim that *Republic*, III, 402 A, points to the illumination through the Idea of the Good (p. 162). The reference here is to the coming of the age of understanding after the first childhood education (see Shorey, *ad loc.*, who compares *Laws*, II, 653 B-C). On the term "illumination", see below, pp. 99 f.

belief that the Ideas are self-existent substances or, at any rate, have an existence of their own in "the place beyond heaven," as the myth of the *Phaedrus* puts it (247 C)? Thus far, the interpretation of the philosophical digression has been based upon the hypothesis that it upholds Plato's concept of the Ideas. The parallels between the arguments proffered in the *Parmenides* and the argument formulated in the letter seemed to confirm this natural assumption. But in retracing one's steps, one does, I believe, find that in fact the philosophical digression defends another view of the nature of the Ideas. For its concept of the soul's kinship with the Idea differs from the Platonic one.

According to the Plato of the dialogues—to speak of him first—man comes "into touch with the nature of each thing in itself by that part of the soul to which it belongs to lay hold on that kind of reality—the part akin to it, namely—and through that approaching it, and consorting with reality really, he would beget intelligence and truth, attain to knowledge and truly live and grow and so find surcease from his travail of soul, but not before" (*Republic*, VI, 490 B). In other words, *nous*, the divine element within men which is kindred to the Ideas, is capable of apprehending what is like itself. According to the letter, the closest kinship exists between the Fourth and the Fifth. Describing the Four, the letter maintains: "Knowledge and intelligence and true opinion regarding these (the three) form a single whole which does not exist in oral utterance or in bodily forms but in souls (ἐν ψυχαῖς); whereby it is plain that it differs from the circle itself and from the three previously mentioned. And of these Four intelligence approaches most nearly in kinship and similarity to the Fifth and the rest are further removed" (342 C-D).

Now this assertion qualifies the nature of the Fourth in two respects. Similar as it is to the Three, it also differs from them. Different as it is from the Idea, it is also similar to it. The former relationship is easily stated. The Fourth is similar to the Three because, like the others, it expresses "the quality of each object no less than its real essence" (342 E); it is different because it resides not in the phenomenal world, but inside man. The relationship between the Fourth and the Idea is harder to determine. The Fourth must differ from the Fifth because each of the Four "proffers to the soul. . . that which is not sought," rather than "the essence", the Fifth, for which the soul (ψυχή) truly strives (343 C).

How, then, can it be similar to the Fifth, even more similar than the other Three? Obviously not because it also contains or reflects the essence, for that is true also of the Three. Their participation in the Ideas, or their imitation of them, gives to things and thoughts some share in the Fifth, however small or imperfect it may be.<sup>62)</sup> Nor can the Fourth be nearest in kinship to the Fifth because, like that part of the soul which Plato glorifies, it can apprehend the Fifth. For this it can, by its very definition, not achieve.<sup>63)</sup> The only possible explanation, it seems, is that the Fourth is nearest to the Fifth because the Ideas themselves are thoughts. If, as Socrates suggests in the *Parmenides*, each of the Ideas is a thought which cannot properly exist anywhere but in souls (ἐν ψυχαῖς [132 B]), the concepts of the Fourth have indeed a special kinship to the Ideas.<sup>64)</sup>

But of course the suggestion of Socrates is rejected by the more experienced Parmenides and given up by Socrates himself (132 B-C). It was never accepted by Plato. For it presupposes that the Ideas are merely thoughts in the soul, that they are not "separate". Yet, as Aristotle attests, there were Platonists who, instead of speaking of "the place beyond heaven" as the dwelling place of the Ideas (*Phaedrus*, 247 C), spoke of "the soul as the place of Ideas" (*On the soul*, III, 4, 429 a 27).<sup>65)</sup> The author of the Seventh Letter,

<sup>62)</sup> Though sometimes it would seem that for Plato the phenomenal world has no reality whatsoever, he does in fact never assert that the sensible world is lacking in all reality (e.g. Runciman, pp. 21; 26; 129). That Plato denies that all Ideas have "sensible images" (*Phaedrus*, 250 D; *Politicus*, 286 A) is another problem, for the discussion of which see N. Gulley, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, 1962, pp. 119; 123 f. In the specific characterisation of the Three the letter seems to be more or less in agreement with Plato.

<sup>63)</sup> Bury compares the statement of the letter with *Republic*, VI, 490 B (ad 342 D), where the relation of the *nous* to the Ideas is formulated and it is recognized as the instrument that leads to knowledge of them. In comparing the same passage and in addition, *Phaedo*, 79 B ff., Patzer suggests that the Fourth is nearer to the Fifth, the eternal, because through memory its content acquires a greater permanence than have the other three (p. 23, note 8). But of this the letter says nothing at all.

<sup>64)</sup> That the *Parmenides* passage quoted in the text recalls the assertion made in the letter concerning the Fourth has been noted by Friedländer (III<sup>2</sup>, p. 180) and Krüger (*Einsicht und Leidenschaft*, 1948, pp. 255 f.). In the *Parmenides*, "the Idea in the mind" is called νόημα (132 B). The letter has previously said that one will not commit to writing "that which is thought by him" (τὰ νοηθέντα, 343 A). Proclus, in his commentary on the *Parmenides* passage (p. 698 [Stallbaum]), states that νοούμενα is the designation of Ideas as thoughts in the soul, while *qua* Ideas, they are designated as νοητά.

<sup>65)</sup> It is sometimes claimed that Aristotle refers to Plato himself and that he in fact believed that the Ideas are thoughts or laws of thought. But,



I suggest, is one of them. Only under this presupposition can one understand that he fails to mention a "there", that he attributes the act of recognizing the Ideas to an inner light rather than to an outer light, and that its appearance is, in addition, made to depend on a special gift inherent in some men.

For, first of all, the Ideas as thoughts of the mind are, as it were, part and parcel of the mind. As Aristotle, who is quite sympathetic toward the theory, says, they are meant to be "actually" in the mind. This indeed seems the only point he finds worth criticizing. For, on his assumption, they should be regarded as "potentially" contained in the mind and activated by the Nous which "comes through the door," just as colours which are "potential" are in a manner converted by light into "actual" colours (430 a 15-17).<sup>66</sup> But if the Ideas are, as the proponents of the theory hold, "actually" in the mind, all man has to do is to become aware of them. He does so by rubbing the Three one against another and testing them by reason. The light that bursts forth, that "nourishes itself" (αὐτὸ ἐαυτὸ . . . τρέφει, [341 D])—the truth which once grasped within the

although Plato occasionally speaks of the Ideas as being within the soul—and it is after all true that he who sees the light without must at the same time also see it within himself; the vision must in some way reside in his soul—he would never have admitted that they are confined to the soul (Friedländer, III<sup>2</sup>, p. 180, with reference to *Meno*, 86 B, among other passages [see also Shorey *ad Republic*, VI, 484 C]). He always insisted that they exist separately (Cherniss, *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato and the Academy*, pp. 206 ff. [on Natorp and Ritter, p. 207, note 124; on Stenzel's interpretation of the Ideas as concepts, p. 214, note 128]) and this existence is not in space or time but another "mode of being," namely, "timeless being" (*op. cit.*, p. 212). Incidentally, as Cherniss has shown, the concept of the Ideas as thoughts of the intellect is earlier than the concept of Ideas as thoughts of God (*A.J.P.*, 59, 1938, p. 355, note 4; see also A. N. M. Rich, "The Platonic Ideas as the Thoughts of God", *Mnemos.* 1954, pp. 123 ff., spec. 127 ff.). I should perhaps add that the Ideas as thoughts of the mind do not lose their status as substantial entities. Such "inconsistency" is characteristic of the ancient theory even in post-Platonic centuries; see Zeller, II, 1<sup>4</sup>, p. 664, note 5.

<sup>66</sup> As is clear from Themistius' commentary on the Aristotelian passage (see Hicks *ad loc.*), it was asked whether the Ideas were in the whole soul or in specific parts of the soul. Since the letter speaks of the "serious" works as abiding "in the fairest region" man possesses (344 C; the head, cf. *Timaeus*, 44 D), it must "localize" the Ideas in this part of the soul. Aristotle's criticism could imply that the adherents of the theory in question used the metaphor of light to characterize the process of recognizing the Ideas, as does the letter. But it is also true that he himself is wont to use the light metaphor in explaining faculties of the mind (III, 3, 429 a 2 f.). And the simile of light or fire—so important in the dialogues—might have come to the mind of any Platonist (e.g. *Republic*, VII, 527 D and the passages quoted above, pp. 95 f.).

soul cannot be forgotten (344 E)— is verily an inner light. It is an illumination in the strict sense of the word, and as such, denotes a Neoplatonic, rather than a Platonic, experience.<sup>67)</sup> Plotinus, too, allows the better part of man's soul "the power to appropriate what he has seen" in the act of finding the Ideas within himself (e.g. *Enneads*, V, 3, 4), no longer distinguishing between him who sees and the object seen. Reinterpreting the *Phaedrus*, he says, "...those drunken with this wine, filled with the nectar, all their soul penetrated by this beauty, cannot remain mere gazers; no longer is there a spectator outside gazing on an outside spectacle; the clear-eyed hold the vision within themselves. . ." (V, 8, 10).<sup>68)</sup>

But, to be sure, such a vision is not a vision of ordinary experience or thought. Unlike such experiences or thoughts, it can, the letter holds, not be expressed in words. It also falls within the province of a specially gifted soul. "Neither receptivity nor memory can ever help him who is not kindred to the object [to see it], for it does not arise to start with in alien states [of the soul]" (344 A).<sup>69)</sup>

<sup>67)</sup> Taylor was I think right when he said that "a smouldering fire bursting into flame in the soul" is Neoplatonic rather than Platonic (Harvard *ad* 341 c 7), and this may not have been the least of his reasons for giving a different interpretation of the passage (cf. above, p. 78). Since the experience to which the letter refers is that of a merely inner light, it is properly speaking an "Erleuchtung" in Stenzel's sense (cf. above, note 61), and it is in accordance with this concept that the epistle speaks of those who are truly philosophic (340 C) and able to reason within themselves (D) as "really inflamed by philosophy, as it were by fire" (B), while those who are not genuine philosophers are "like men whose bodies are sunburnt on the surface" (D). The concept of a fire that nourishes itself, on the other hand, recalls the Platonic statement that the pasture "there" is the nourishment of the soul (*Phaedrus*, 248 B-C; see also *Republic*, VI, 490 B); the use of φρόνησις in addition to νοῦς for the illumination which takes place recalls Plato's use of προηῆσαι and ἐμφρόνως in describing the outcome of seeing the Good (*Republic*, VII, 518 E; 517 C); cf. also *Phaedo*, 79 D.

<sup>68)</sup> Plotinus' attitude in this respect has been rightly contrasted with Plato's by Friedländer (I<sup>2</sup>, pp. 86 f.); his vision of the One, too, is "Erleuchtung" (Zeller, III, 2<sup>3</sup>, p. 616; cf. p. 429; see also Friedländer, pp. 89 f.).

<sup>69)</sup> Since according to Müller the words in question as they stand provide an all too drastic testimony for the unplatonic psychology of the letter ("die eigentümliche Erkenntnispsychologie, die . . . in der Seele ein Licht aufleuchten lässt"), he would like to insert ἰδεῖν before ἐν ἀλλοτρίαις ἔξῃσι (p. 263). But, as he admits, the sentence is meaningful without such an addition, and the majority of the editors do not supply any word whatsoever; the words "to see" can easily be understood by what has been said immediately before about Lynceus' sharp sight. (The reference to him seems to be inspired by *Republic*, VII, 527 E.)

"Knowledge of the well-grown (εὖ πεφυκός) is engendered in a man who is well-grown" (εὖ πεφυκότη [343 E]). That is, the vision is not vouchsafed to every soul; it is granted only to that soul which has a faculty identical in nature with the Idea, a faculty not given to everyone. He who has it, the true philosopher, is divine (Θεῖος ὢν [340 C]).<sup>70</sup> Likewise, Plotinus, when speaking of the vision of the One, declares, in an obvious reference to the Seventh Letter, that it is "not to be told, not to be written, as Plato says" (VI, 9, 4); it can only be experienced: "present, it remains absent save to those fit to receive, disciplined into some accordance, able to touch it closely by their likeness (ὁμοιότητι) and by that kindred power (δυνάμει συγγενεῖ) within themselves through which, remaining as it was when it came to them from the Supreme, they are enabled to see in so far as God may be at all seen" (*ibid.*). The notion of a special insight bestowed upon the few is indeed Plotinian rather than Platonic.<sup>71</sup>

In the *Parmenides*, Plato admits that there are great difficulties involved in his theory of Ideas, in converting one who objects to it. Only "a man of exceptional gifts," he says, "will be able to see that a Form or essence just by itself does exist in each case" (135 A; cf. 133 B). And he adds, almost plaintively, that "it will require someone still more remarkable to discover it and to instruct another who has thoroughly examined all these difficulties" (135 B). The author of the Seventh Letter, I think, wanted to be this "still

<sup>70</sup> For Plato, to be sure, every soul has a divine element, namely, reason (e.g. *Republic*, VII, 518 E). But if I am not mistaken, he never calls the philosopher "divine"; he is a being in between man and the divine. At most, the guardians of the best city can, after their death, be worshipped as "happy and divine" (*Republic*, VII, 540 C). But in the *Laws* (XII, 951 B), he speaks of divine men, to whom it is worth talking and who are to be found even in states with defective laws. He seems to mean inspired men, like poets and prophets (cf. England, *ad loc.*; and also *Symposium*, 209 B, where Θεῖος, if it is the correct reading, is equivalent to ἐνθεος [Bury, *ad loc.*]). This theory of divine inspiration plays a great role in the Platonic dialogues. The author of the letter may well have borrowed his usage of the term Θεῖος from such passages as I refer to and applied it to the philosopher. This would go well with his use of the term εὐφυής, which expresses the special relation of the philosophical soul to the truth (see above, p. 92).

<sup>71</sup> The reference to Plato, which, as is usual with Plotinus, is implied by φησιν, mentions no particular writing. But I am not aware of any passages he could have in mind other than that in the *Parmenides*, or that in the Seventh Letter, which Proclus quotes when commenting on the *Parmenides* (see above, p. 88). Concerning Plotinus' concept of an illumination which is the prerogative of a special kind of soul, see Friedländer, I<sup>2</sup>, p. 88.

more remarkable" man, who has solved the "worst difficulty." But the solution he proposes is unplatonic.

One must not, however, overlook the fact that in proposing his version of Platonism, the forger of the letter is skillful in making use of Platonic material. There is an abundance of terms that appear in the dialogues in exactly the same sense or at least in a very similar one.<sup>72</sup>) And the manner in which the issue at stake is stated is in conformity with the attitude of the older Plato. The philosophical digression obviously sees the problem of the existence of Ideas as a problem of knowledge, of how man, with the means actually available to him, can reach insight; the discussion is, to use a modern term, epistemological. In Plato's later dialogues, too, his interest centers on epistemology.<sup>73</sup>) In the *Theaetetus* as well as in the *Philebus*, Plato gives an analysis of the act of knowing that stresses as it were the contribution of the knower to the known. Knowledge, though not sense perception, is in its first state the converging of sense perceptions "in some single nature—a mind [or soul] (ψυχήν) or whatever it is to be called" (184 D). And although hardness and softness are perceived by touch, the existence of things, their contrariety, are things "which the mind itself under-

<sup>72</sup>) Some of these agreements in terminology have been pointed out above, notes 16; 18; 50; 67; 69. In addition, compare 341C, ξαίφνης with *Symposium*, 210 E; 341 D; 344 D, φύσις as true reality, with *Republic*, X, 597 B; 598 A; *Phaedo*, 103 B; 343 B, τὸ τί, with *Parmenides* 164 A (as suggested by W. Andreae, "Die philosophischen Probleme in den platonischen Briefen," *Philologus*, 78, 1922, p. 35); 344 B, τριβόμενα, with *Republic*, IV, 435 A; *Gorgias*, 484 B; μόγισ with *Phaedrus*, 248 A; *Republic*, VII, 517 B (but also below, p. 103); εὔμενεσι ἐλέγχοις ἐλεγχόμενα ἀνευ φθόνου with *Philebus*, 16 A; *Symposium*, 210 D; 344 D, πρῶτα καὶ ἄκρα with *Theaetetus*, 210 E; 202 A-B (Harward, *ad Ep.* II, 312 D, takes it to mean soul; cf. Novotny *ad* 345 a 2) and *Politicus*, 268 E; also *Laws*, X, 892 B-C. The term πρᾶγμα has a number of meanings; in 340 C; E; 341 A; 341 C, it may simply signify "subject," but in 344 A, it is surely the Fifth, the Idea. K. Oehler ("Die Lehre vom noetischen und dianoetischen Denken bei Platon und Aristoteles," *Zetemata*, 29, 1962) tries to show that in Plato, too, the word refers to the Ideas (p. 78, note 1; his interpretation of *Sophist*, 262 D 8-E 1 conflicts with L. Campbell's [*Journal of Philology*, VI, 1876, pp. 286 f.]). Shorey admits that πρᾶγμα, though "often a colorless supergeneral word," could denote the Ideas (*What Plato Said*, p. 497 *ad* Protagoras 330 C-D [I owe this reference, as that to Campbell, to H. Cherniss]).

<sup>73</sup>) This term perhaps characterizes best the difference in approach noticeable in the later dialogues, which, as Runciman says, are "more modest in aim and analytical in tone" (p. 128) than the great dialogues of the middle period—that is, they scrutinize the manner in which man acquires knowledge rather than describe the ascent to the realm of Ideas.

takes to judge for us, when it reflects upon them and compares one with another" (186 B). Perceptions are natural "sufferings" from the moment of birth; reflections about them with respect to their existence and usefulness only come, if they come at all, with difficulty (μόγισ), through a long and troublesome process of education" (C). The mind is therefore likened first to a wax tablet (191 C) on which impressions are stamped, and then to an aviary (196 D ff.) in which one catches not birds, but pieces of knowledge (198 A). Knowledge is an activity of the soul, so much so, that we may even imagine the soul to be a book (*Philebus*, 38 E) into which one workman writes words, while another paints pictures into it (39 B). In short, Plato develops the subjective approach to knowledge in these dialogues. The *Sophist* and the *Politicus*, on the other hand, center on the question of naming and defining, the instruments by which that which is known is expressed and communicated. Definitions are systematically derived according to the principle of *dihairesis*. Their adequacy within the structure of reality is scrutinized. A greater appreciation of the empirical data involved in the process of acquiring knowledge is perhaps noticeable. <sup>74)</sup>

If all this prepares the approach one finds in the letter, one can also discover in the later dialogues statements which seem to open the possibility of redefining the nature of the Ideas. In the *Sophist*, Plato introduces an argument which points to the conclusion that the Ideas, of which he had said earlier that they are eternally identical and unchanging, have life, or are besouled. Trying to end the battle between the gods and the giants—the idealists and the materialists—he suggests that the Ideas must have "the power of being acted upon and of acting in relation to however insignificant a thing" (248 C). The real is called a third thing over and above rest and movement, residing "in the soul" (250 B). It is true, the Stranger immediately shows that such an assumption is impossible. The argument ends in an *aporia*. <sup>75)</sup> But it could well be inter-

<sup>74)</sup> The αἰσθηταὶ ὁμοιότητες are mentioned with approval (*Politicus*, 285 E; cf. B; see also *Philebus*, 62 A, concerning the knowledge of the divine and human circles). However, the terminological divisions given in the *Sophist* and *Politicus* do not replace the dialectics of the earlier dialogues, as is most clearly shown by the reference to the θεῖα τέχνη (*Sophist*, 266 A; cf. *Politicus*, 262 C ff. [cf. Frank, *A.J.P.*, 1940, pp. 168 ff.]). Stenzel's view that these dialogues attest a development of Plato's thought toward Aristotelianism (see also s.v. Speusippus, *R.E.*, III, A 2, col. 1646 f.; 1651, 11 [with reference to Ep. VII]) is not convincing (see also above, note 65).

<sup>75)</sup> Cf. Friedländer, III<sup>2</sup>, pp. 245-49; Runciman, *op. cit.*, pp. 76 ff.; 80.

preted by someone else as leading to the right solution, as could Socrates' suggestion in the *Parmenides* and his dream in the *Theaetetus*. Some of these passages have, in fact, been taken by modern interpreters as showing the direction in which Plato intended, or should have intended, to develop his philosophy.<sup>76</sup>

And yet, although at the end of his life Plato explores ever new possibilities, he holds fast to the theory of Ideas as he developed it in the beginning. Even the later dialogues make it clear that despite the fact that he has become more aware of the difficulties to which such a definition of the Ideas inevitably leads, he still conceives of the Ideas as transcendent. Moreover, Aristotle's testimony proves not only that Plato never abandoned the *chorismos* in his writings, but also that he did not do so in his lectures or in his "oral teaching", with which Aristotle was quite familiar.<sup>77</sup> As always, Plato preserves the balance between opposing tendencies. The author of the letter fails to do so. For him, the subjective cancels out the objective, the reality of the mind comes to supersede the reality of external Being. It is, in a manner of speaking, true that his Plato only says what Plato himself has said "frequently. . . in the past" (342 A). But the forger has entirely changed the empha-

<sup>76</sup> See e.g. Krüger, pp. 254 f. (after having quoted the *Sophist* and *Parmenides*, he says: "Man kann sich nur darüber wundern, dass Plato diese hohe Verwandtschaft von Seele und Göttlichem nicht viel mehr ausgewertet hat."). That the *Parmenides* rejects the thesis that the Ideas are in the mind has been shown above, note 65. The theory of the *Theaetetus* (201 D ff.), shared by the letter, that the certainty of the soul is irrefutable despite all arguments brought against one's position (above, p. 90) is criticized immediately and rejected (Friedländer, III<sup>2</sup>, pp. 168 f.; Runciman, pp. 45; 47). But I cannot agree with Friedländer that the end of the *Theaetetus* implies that knowledge is higher than reason, as it is for the Seventh Letter (III<sup>2</sup>, pp. 170 f.). (In the first edition of his book, Friedländer likened the gaining of this knowledge to the Neoplatonic *anagoge* [II, p. 457].) And if he finds that there is perhaps a premonition of the *Erkenntnisweg* of the Seventh Letter in the *Cratylus* (II<sup>2</sup>, p. 198), one must remember that this dialogue proposes a reform of the existing language "which will make it an adequate instrument of inquiry" (Gulley, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, p. 69, with reference to 390 C-D).

<sup>77</sup> Aristotle's testimony (for its importance cf. Zeller, II, 1, pp. 663 f.; Cherniss, *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato and the Academy*, I, pp. 206 ff.) makes it impossible to assume that in his old age Plato moved gradually toward the solution proposed in the letter, but failed to integrate it into his last dialogues. Even the *Philebus* and the *Laws* defend the theory of Ideas (cf. Cherniss, I, p. 214, note 128 [also *Riddle of the Academy*, p. 60]; Runciman, pp. 54 f.; 130), which for Plato remained throughout an indispensable hypothesis of thought (H. Cherniss, "The Philosophical Economy of the Theory of Ideas", *A.J.P.*, 57, 1936, pp. 445 ff.).

sis. He does not succeed in what he wanted to accomplish—in stating, contrary to the opinion of all contemporary interpreters and even contrary to what all future interpreters may say (341 C), the true meaning of Platonism. In the end, he is even drawn into perverting its very essence.

For a perception of the existence of Ideas such as the philosopher who is “divine” can have is outside the realm of rational discourse. It is a mere vision, mere experience, not “knowledge that can be communicated as can the other kinds of learning” (ῥητὸν . . . οὐδαμῶς . . . ὥς ἄλλα μαθήματα [341 C]). For Plato, on the other hand, to see the Idea of the Good is to acquire “the greatest learning” (μάθημα . . . μέγιστον, *Republic*, VII, 519 C; VI, 505 A and *Symposium*, 211 C). For one can go on to speak about the object of this *visio intellectualis*. Seen “with difficulty” at the end of the road of dialectic, the Idea of the Good “must needs point us to the conclusion” (συλλογιστέα εἶναι, VII, 517 B-C) that this is indeed the cause for all things of all that is right and beautiful. . .” (cf. 516 B, συλλογίζοιτο). The relation of the Idea of the Good to the world of phenomena can be determined by an analogy (*Republic*, VI, 506 E ff.). The Good can be defined as the source of knowledge and truth (509 A-B). Plato, then, does not become silent before the vision of the realm of Ideas.<sup>78</sup> It is for him not the “full knowledge” of the letter (342 D-E) which puts an end to all further questions. On the contrary, what is to start with an act of seeing raises new questions and demands further investigations.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>78</sup>) Recent interpreters are wont to stress the intuitive character of the Platonic knowledge of the Idea of the Good (e.g. Krüger, pp. 199; 273); that “extra intuition which in the *Republic* was declared to be the reward of the consummate dialectician” (Runciman, p. 40; cf. pp. 10; 54 f.). But in comparing the Seventh Letter with the dialogues, it is necessary to remember that the Platonic vision is not ineffable (Misch, p. 149), as the passages quoted in the text show (on Plato’s use of analogy, see Frank, *A.J.P.*, 1940, pp. 51 ff.; p. 180, note 64). The dialectician can “render and exact an account of opinions in discussion” (*Republic*, VII, 531 E and the parallels quoted by Shorey *ad. loc.*). What distinguishes his knowledge, what makes it not “dreaming about Being but the clear waking vision” (533 C), is that he does not leave his assumptions undisturbed and can give an account of them. Only thus can assent “ever be converted into true knowledge or science” (*ibid.*); only he who can define the Good in his discourse really knows “the Good itself or any particular good” (534 C), while he who cannot is “dreaming and dozing through his present life” (*ibid.*).

<sup>79</sup>) It is, of course, true that strictly speaking the *Republic* and the Seventh Letter are not concerned with the same problem. While the dialogue speaks of the Idea of the Good, the epistle speaks of individual Ideas, in agreement

Aristotle says of those initiated into the mysteries that "they are not supposed to learn anything (μαθεῖν τι) but to be affected in a certain way (παθεῖν τι) and put into a certain frame of mind" (Fr. 95 [Rose], 1483 a 19). Thus one may say that for the author of the letter, in contrast to Plato, the vision of Ideas is an affection of the soul comparable to the ancient mystic experience.<sup>80</sup>) It is also an experience that from every point of view could be called mystic. For if anything has been characteristic of mysticism in all ages and among all people, it is "the temporary shattering of our ordinary spatial and temporal consciousness and of discursive intellect," the extinction of thought, the renunciation of the word.<sup>81</sup>)

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with the formulation of the *Parmenides*. But the Idea of the Good in the *Republic* represents the Beyond in which the Ideas reside and the letter refers to the whole realm of Being. The difference between the two documents, therefore, is a difference in approach rather than in substance. Moreover, I am above all intent on pointing out that when the dialogues speak of an intellectual vision they do not regard it as the last thing to be mentioned. Bluck (*ad* 342 E) suggests that in the letter Plato solves the problem of the *Parmenides* on the basis of the *Timaeus*, which makes "the reasoning part of the human soul much the same as the soul of the universe, which has direct knowledge of the Circle of the Same" (37 B). But later on, the *Timaeus* gives Plato's usual explanation for the hypothesis of the existence of Ideas (51 D-E; cf. Cherniss, *Riddle of the Academy*, pp. 84 f.), and there still remains the difference between the two kinds of visions which I have emphasized.

<sup>80</sup>) On the Aristotelian fragment and its historical importance, see J. Croissant, *Aristote et les mystères*, 1932, pp. 137 ff. Plutarch (*On the Eclipse of the Oracles*, 422 C) confirms the absence of intellectual instruction in the mysteries. Müller says of the experience described in the letter: "nur ein Aha; ich hab's" (pp. 262 f.). This is hardly a sufficient characterization of the light which brings knowledge that increases and cannot be lost (cf. above, p. 99, and Patzer, pp. 29 f.). I note that Plotinus (VI, 9, 3, cf. above, p. 101) speaks of πᾶσι in connection with the vision of the truth.

<sup>81</sup>) Most interpreters refrain from applying the term mysticism to the doctrine of the letter (E. Hoffmann, "Die Sprache u. die archaische Logik," *Heidelberger Abhandlungen*, 3, 1925, pp. 73 ff.; Stenzel, *op. cit.*, pp. 155 ff.; 168; also G. Pasquali, *Le Lettere di Platone*, 1938, pp. 77 ff.; Patzer, p. 30; Friedländer, I<sup>2</sup>, pp. 65 ff.; 80 ff.). And indeed, if by mysticism one means the absence of all philosophical reasoning, the letter is not the work of a mystic. But this definition would leave no room for philosophers such as Plotinus. The definition I have accepted (cf. C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayers*, 1963-64, p. 64) emphasizes, rightly I think, that aspect of mysticism which Plotinus seems to have in mind when he compares the ineffability of the One to the silence imposed upon those initiated into the mysteries (VI, 9, 11)—that aspect which is missing in Plato, for whom the language of the mystery has become a mere literary device (cf. *Republic*, VI, 533 A, φήναιεν, and Shorey, *ad loc.*; and for the "mystères littéraires" and the literature on the



Among the interpreters of the Seventh Letter, no one, I think, felt this difference between the author of the dialogues and the author of the epistle as strongly as did Kant. He recognized that Plato had believed in the existence of transcendental Ideas and thought that he was forced to embrace such a doctrine because he understood space as a category of reason rather than of perception. Through this "fatal mistake," Plato, in Kant's opinion, became "the father of all enthusiasm in philosophy," that is, of the belief in the accessibility of non-cognitive insight. But this, Kant was careful to add, happened "without his fault," for Plato himself was not an enthusiast, but a philosopher and a mathematician; he tried to save the mathematical *apriori*.<sup>82</sup>) In the author of the letter, on the other hand, Kant saw not only an "enthusiast," but a mystagogue, who was "putting on airs"—as he dubbed him, a clubbist, a word that in the English of his time was used to designate the members of the many closed circles that formed in France during the Revolution. For he addresses himself to the select few rather than to men in general. He is contemptuous of the people and presupposes that special qualities, not within the reach of everyone, make the philosopher. Consequently, Kant concluded that he would not like "to confuse" the author of the letter with the author of the dialogues.<sup>83</sup>)

It seems to me that Kant's words are still as true as they were when they were originally written, and that it is necessary—as he says—to make a choice between the Plato of the dialogues and the Plato of the philosophical digression. They cannot be the same—not only for the reasons to which Kant refers; the story of the test, the condemnation of writing, the method of discovering the Ideas

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subject, E. Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*, 1958, pp. 14 f.). Harward (*ad Ep. II*, 314 a 7-b 7) uses the word mysticism with reference to the suddenness of the vision. But this is only accidental to it and would be true also of Plato's *visio intellectualis*. Howald speaks of an irrational element, but a rational end (p. 49; cf. 33 f.). The converse statement would seem to me more adequate.

<sup>82</sup>) *Von einem neuerdings erhobenen, vornehmen Ton in der Philosophie* (I. Kant's *Sämtliche Werke*, IV, 1921, pp. 823 f.; 831 [Grossherzog Wilhelm Ernst Ausgabe]). Stenzel (*op. cit.*, p. 154) seems to have been the first to draw attention to Kant's essay; it is mentioned later, e.g. by Krüger, *op. cit.*, p. 282. Stenzel ascribes to Kant an antiplatonic attitude, wrongly, I think. Kant is opposing the author of the letter, not Plato. Cf. below, p. 119.

<sup>83</sup>) *Op. cit.*, pp. 831 f.

and the concept of the Idea itself as found in the letter are foreign to Plato's thought. <sup>84)</sup>

#### 4. THE IMPORT OF THE SO-CALLED PHILOSOPHICAL DIGRESSION

Within the narrative of the Seventh Letter, the discussion of Plato's philosophy—the philosophical digression—does not come unexpectedly. The test given to Dionysius leads to a statement concerning Plato's views on the highest and first truth of Nature, and this statement again leads to an argument against any written proof of the existence of Ideas. The style of the philosophical digression is the same as that of the narrative. <sup>85)</sup> And both are unplatonic in content. There is no need to alter the judgment of the author made on the basis of the autobiography. One has not been told anything that would force one to assume that there is a Platonic doctrine outside or beyond the dialogues.

The philosophical digression proper may appear to be somewhat lengthy and detailed in a letter addressed to Dion's followers and pretending to offer them political advice, but the digressional style is characteristic of the letter. <sup>86)</sup> However, as I said before, one does wonder why it is at this time and on this occasion that Plato tells what he has so far refrained from putting down in his published works. Certainly his *apologia pro vita sua* is meant to be read by the public at large. To write about his serious thoughts is inconsistent with his belief that one should not write about them nor admit the *hoi polloi* to them. <sup>87)</sup>

To be sure, the author clearly wishes to give his view of Platonism, he is eager to refute both present and future interpreters of

<sup>84)</sup> For the disagreement among modern interpreters with regard to the genuineness of the philosophical digression, see above, note 1. It is perhaps not amiss to add that they disagree in part because some of them emphasize the evaluation of name, definition and sensual representation, while others stress the solution proposed. But in my opinion, these two aspects of the philosophical digression are equally important and, taken together, give it its peculiar character.

<sup>85)</sup> Cf. Taylor, *Mind*, 83, 1912, pp. 350 ff. Concerning the theory that the philosophical digression is an addition, see above, p. 71.

<sup>86)</sup> Compare, for instance, the section on the counsel given to Dion's followers (330 C ff.), where 330 C-331 D, 333 D-334 A, and 334 D-336 C are clearly not part and parcel of the advice itself, not to mention minor digressions that are found throughout the letter (see also above, note 141).

<sup>87)</sup> For the epistle as "an 'open' letter addressed rather to the general than to the parties named in the superscription," see e.g. Bury, p. 474, and Howald, p. 17; also below, p. 152.

Plato (341 C; 334 A). But it is not for this reason alone, I think, that he presents a sketch of Plato's philosophy. He cannot avoid being inconsistent. Without an elaboration of the Platonic teaching as he sees it, he could not have made the narrative convincing at all. His main aim, after all, is to justify and to explain in the right way Plato's participation in politics (352 A). In doing this, he goes so far as to assert that Plato hated "to be utterly and absolutely nothing more than a mere word" (328 C); for his Plato who is a statesman no less than a philosopher, life in the Academy is no more than a "not ignoble" profession (329 B).<sup>88</sup>) The philosophical digression alone makes it understandable that his Plato considers the deed to be equivalent to the word, if not even superior to it, why he thinks it reprehensible to be a man of mere words. For it shows that the word is silenced before the truth. Thus the word, or speech (λόγος), of which the *Republic* proclaims that it is "more plastic than wax and other such media" (IX, 588 D), has lost its prerogative. It does not partake in the truth more than does the deed. The relationship between the theoretical and practical aspects of philosophical existence is therefore changed. Action in the service of philosophy becomes as important as philosophizing. And for the philosopher himself—once the illumination has taken place—no other task remains than that of being "the leader on the road" (340 C), of guiding others, of transmitting to them what he has found to be the right approach to the solution of the riddle. He has become a mere teacher. Within the framework of the representation of the events in Sicily which the author has constructed, the philosophical digression seems indispensable if the story is to be credible; in the strict sense of the term, the philosophical digression is not a digression at all.<sup>89</sup>)

It is not only in this respect that the author has succeeded in unifying his tale and in drawing a unified picture of his hero. Plato is throughout the same, he is of one piece, a man of one mind. He is worldly wise in taking on pupils just as he is in engaging in political action in general and in judging men. He stresses the difficulties faced by the student of philosophy so as not to be blamed after-

<sup>88</sup>) Cf. above, p. 19.

<sup>89</sup>) That the philosophical digression is essential also for the last part of the report on the third trip because it sets the standard by which Dionysius' behavior toward Plato is judged (345 C) has been shown, above, p. 51. How aptly it is fitted into the context of the preceding pages (337 E ff.) has been pointed out by Morrow, p. 66.

wards when the task turns out to be arduous. In the same manner, he proffers advice to his fellow citizens only if asked for it, thus avoiding all risks that might come from unwanted interference; he speaks to tyrants in "veiled language."<sup>90</sup> On the other hand, in his own province he is full of self-assurance and conscious of his merits. Dion calls him the one who, better than anyone else, can bring men to a right understanding of life (328 D). Later, Plato himself insists on the respect one owes him as the discoverer of a new way of philosophizing. At the very beginning, he has spoken of Socrates as merely his friend, not his teacher.<sup>91</sup>

There is also a remarkable unity in Plato's philosophical position. In the narrative, Plato never asks Dionysius to withdraw even temporarily from his duties as the ruler of his country and devote himself entirely to philosophy. He is expected merely to learn, to listen to discourses on philosophy, to associate with Plato (330 A-B). No preparatory training in mathematics or dialectics is suggested. As the test given to Dionysius shows (340 D), one can become a philosopher-king while "occupied in whatever occupation he may find himself." And the philosophical digression makes it clear that this Plato does not attribute any specific value to mathematical studies or dialectical training.<sup>92</sup> He looks for pupils who have the special gift requisite for the philosopher. Those able to see the truth are few and favorites of Heaven. To this philosophical exclusiveness there corresponds a political exclusiveness. The best plan for the reform of Sicily, the plan originally devised, foresees the leadership of a small circle of associates.<sup>93</sup> Moreover, if anything is needed for philosophizing in addition to "affinity with the object" it is knowledge of vice and virtue; the mode of daily life must be such that one is "able to reason within himself soberly" (340 D). Thus Dionysius was urged before to acquire above all "harmony within himself" (332 D); to make himself "right-minded and sober-minded" (E).<sup>94</sup> Last but not least, as the exposition of

<sup>90</sup>) Cf. above, p. 29.

<sup>91</sup>) For Platonism as a way of life, see also below, p. 162 f.; on Plato's relationship to Socrates, above, p. 7.

<sup>92</sup>) On the test and on mathematical studies, see above, pp. 71 ff., and pp. 90 f.

<sup>93</sup>) Cf. above, pp. 29 ff.

<sup>94</sup>) The emphasis on sober thoughts goes with an emphasis on a sober life (340 D), which in turn makes it understandable that Plato condemns Sicilian luxury (above, p. 64, note 148).

Plato's philosophy puts it, "living with the object" brings about understanding; the "light of intelligence and reason" bursts forth in him who rubs all his thoughts one against the other. It is almost in this very manner that Plato's discovery of the main tenets of his political philosophy is described at the very beginning of the letter. Reflecting on his experiences, comparing the political situation in Athens with that in the world at large, he feels "compelled" to declare that philosophy alone discerns "all forms of justice both philosophical and individual" (326 A). <sup>95</sup>)

The author of the letter, then, is quite an impressive writer. He is also a man of philosophical acumen, though it is difficult to judge his originality since the particular view of the Ideas he embraces was shared by others, and it is unknown what they said in defense of their position. But he has at least recognized the fact that the problem of the existence of the Ideas provides the eternal challenge to the Platonist, that the question of how one can acquire knowledge of true being, is the decisive issue in Platonic philosophy. Perhaps he was also aware of the fact that Plato never gives a systematic demonstration of the existence of the Ideas, that skillful as he is in recounting all the difficulties involved in his doctrine, he never offers a formal proof of it. <sup>96</sup>) If so, he may have considered his enterprise even more justifiable because he showed a way out of the *aporia* which the Platonist faces. As regards his solution, it has proved throughout the history of Platonism the one and only logical counter-position to Plato's theory of transcendence. Porphyry, whose *Introduction to the Categories* leaves it undecided whether the Ideas are self-subsistent or within the mind, had many predecessors and followers. <sup>97</sup>)

<sup>95</sup>) Friedländer holds that in the passage in question the concept of philosophy "am Schluss aufspringt, ohne dass irgendwie gesagt würde, wie er zu dieser Philosophie gekommen ist" (I<sup>2</sup>, p. 6). This is true in the sense that the word philosophy has not been mentioned before. But what is said about its content seems merely to summarize the outcome of all the experiences Plato had had. He is the empirical and practical philosopher who reacts to events, who learns by "suffering" (above, p. 10). He has what Misch properly calls a "reactive" attitude (p. 130).

<sup>96</sup>) On the lack of "any complete presentation" of the theory of Ideas in the dialogues, see Grube, *Plato's Thought*, p. 6; also Taylor, *Commentary on the Timaeus* (ad 51 C 5-D 3). The manner in which Plato deals with the relation between Ideas and phenomena in the *Phaedo* is not uncharacteristic of his unsystematic approach (100 D); see also *Theaetetus*, 184 D.

<sup>97</sup>) See Boethius' translation of Porphyry's *Isagoge in Categorias*, and on the survival of the interpretation in question in antiquity as well as in the

If the author differs from Plato, he does, in his interpretation of his main doctrine, merely what other members of the Old Academy did. Speusippus, Xenocrates and Aristotle had their own understanding of the theory of Ideas. They also differed in their interpretation of specific teachings of Plato. While Aristotle took the story of the creation of the world told in the *Timaeus* literally, Speusippus and Xenocrates insisted that it was to be taken metaphorically, that it had been composed for the sake of instruction. Crantor defined the world soul of the *Timaeus* differently from the way Xenocrates did. To be a Platonist, for all these men, did not mean to adhere to a rigid dogma.<sup>98)</sup> And when the forger presents his interpretation of Plato as a doctrine which Plato had not communicated to others, at least not in writing, he may be thinking of his master, who maintains that Protagoras has "reserved the truth as a secret doctrine to be revealed to his disciples" (*Theaetetus*, 152 D), and then proceeds to initiate his partner in the dialogue into the secret (155 D ff.; 180 C-D).<sup>99)</sup> The forger may even have found encouragement for his claim that Plato did not think it fitting to publicize his views in the assertion of the *Timaeus* that "to discover the Maker and Father of the Universe were a task indeed; and having discovered them to declare them to all men a thing impossible" (28 C); that the principles higher than the principles of fire and all the other elements "are known only to God and the man who is near to God" (53 D-E). Plato, to be sure, is speaking playfully, as befits the myth of creation. But such statements can easily be construed as justifying a philosophy restricted to the few.<sup>100)</sup> Finally, if one wonders that a man who has something of his own to say should publish it in Plato's name, one need only remember

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Middle Ages, Zeller, II, 1<sup>4</sup>, p. 664, note 5. For modern adherents of the view that the Ideas are thoughts, cf. above, note 65.

<sup>98)</sup> Concerning the interpretation of Plato's doctrine by Speusippus, Xenocrates, and Aristotle, see Cherniss, *The Riddle of the Early Academy*, pp. 31 ff. On the exegesis of the *Timaeus*, see Zeller, II, 1<sup>4</sup>, p. 792, note 1.

<sup>99)</sup> Socrates' proposal "to follow up" the meaning of Protagoras' saying (ἐπακολουθήσομεν αὐτῷ, 152 B) is characteristic of this "unhistorical" attitude (cf. Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, p. 31).

<sup>100)</sup> Cicero (*De universo*, 2) took *Timaeus*, 28 C to mean that one should not talk about the deity in public (Zeller, II, 1<sup>4</sup>, p. 486, note 1), and of modern interpreters, Geffcken finds in the same passage the feeling characteristic of the Seventh Letter (*Griech. Literaturgesch.*, II, p. 160). Nor must one forget what was called Plato's σιωπώμενον ἄγαθόν, to which even Plutarch refers in talking about the reaction of the Sicilian courtiers to Plato (cf. above, p. 23, note 55).

those dialogues put out in the last third of the fourth century which treat various subjects in an unplatonic manner and yet were circulated as Plato's. It takes a bit of audacity to put on the mask of Plato as does the author of the letter. But had not Plato himself put on the mask of Socrates and of the other interlocutors of his dialogues? Had he not defended Socrates and represented in writing what had been an oral teaching? And were there not the "unwritten doctrines" of Plato who had never spoken in his own name in the works he gave to the public? <sup>101)</sup>

I am not sure that the author of the letter, had one asked him what his purpose was in writing the autobiography, would have claimed more than that he wished to give his view of Plato and Plato's philosophy. However that may be, even the critics who disagree with him and his exposition must admit, I think, that the epistle casts a spell upon the reader. Though he has his favorite dialogues—the *Phaedo*, the *Republic*, the *Parmenides*, and the *Theaetetus*—and is especially well versed in Plato's later thought, he is thoroughly familiar with all the other writings. He lives, as it were, in the dialogues and Platonic phrases come to his mind naturally for the purpose of expressing his ideas. <sup>102)</sup> While he goes against the very essence of Platonism by denying the separate existence of the Ideas, by assigning equal value to *theoria* and *praxis*, he retains some of its other-worldliness by endorsing the belief "in the ancient and holy doctrines which declare to us that the soul is immortal and that it has judges and pays the greatest penalties whenever a man is released from his body" (335 A). As for Plato so for him these wondrous tales about the fate of the soul after death and before life will hardly be more than stories intended to soothe "the child within us." <sup>103)</sup> But the combination of the doctrine of immor-

<sup>101)</sup> Concerning the oral teaching supposedly reproduced in the letter, see above, pp. 85 f.; concerning "the unwritten doctrines," p. 104. I have collected some ancient comments on Plato's anonymity (*A.J.P.*, 1962, p. 6). I take it that contrary to the thesis of Taylor and Burnet, the dialogues are not a historical representation of Socrates and others (*loc. cit.*, pp. 4 f.). It is interesting to note that Xenocrates attributed to Pythagoras doctrines which he took from the Platonic writings (Fr. 9 [Heinze] and Frank, *Plato u. d. sog. Pythagoreer*, p. 136); later, Erastosthenes most likely introduced Plato himself into his *Platonicus*.

<sup>102)</sup> Echoes of the dialogues are collected by Boas, *Philos. Review*, 1948, pp. 454 f. Concerning the similarity with the doctrine of the later dialogues, see above, section 3.

<sup>103)</sup> Cf. "The Function of the Myth in Plato's Philosophy," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, X, 1949, p. 476.

tality with the fundamentally empirical outlook makes his interpretation conservative and heretical at the same time. And on the whole his view of Platonism is not lacking in grandeur. When one has finished reading the philosophical digression—his “myth and wandering,” as he calls it (344 D)—one may reject his story as false, but one cannot refuse to regard it with respect. <sup>104)</sup>

Thinking of the author as a man who wrote in the first decades after Plato's death, as one must in accordance with the results of the analysis of the autobiography, one will not be astonished that, though his language in general is quite Platonic, he uses in the exposition of Plato's philosophy a few expressions in the sense that they came to have only with Aristotle. One does not easily escape from the atmosphere of one's time. <sup>105)</sup> In other respects too, perhaps, he is a man of his generation. The old Academy, generally speaking, minimized the value of dialectics for the acquisition of knowledge and assigned a larger role to experience, while emphasizing the importance of ethical and practical questions. Concerned as they were with the theory of Ideas, they weakened and toned down Platonic idealism, so much so, in fact, that soon, under the leadership of Arcesilaus, the school became outspokenly sceptical. <sup>106)</sup>

<sup>104)</sup> Howald translates *μῦθος καὶ πλάνος* as “Mythos und tastende Rede”; Harward has “discourse and digression”; Bluck, “story and digression.” The correctness of the term “digression” seems to me doubtful. *πλάνος* would appear to mean the same as *πλάνη* (*Parmenides*, 136 E; cf. above, note 47). *μῦθος* could well be used as it is in the *Theaetetus*, when Socrates tells the initiates “the tale of Protagoras” (156 C; cf. 164 D). It surely does not betray a misunderstanding of Platonic terminology on the part of the forger, as Müller holds (*Arch. f. Gesch. d. Philos.*, 1948, p. 267, note 33). The translation “tale”, therefore, would be preferable to “discourse.”

<sup>105)</sup> Boas has listed two words (*ἐπιχείρησιν* [341 E] and *τὸ ποῖόν τι* [342 E]) as Aristotelian echoes (*Philos. Review*, 1948, p. 456 [above, note 37]). But the Aristotelian usage of *ἐπιχείρησις* seems to be prepared by such Platonic passages as *Sophist*, 239 C (cf. Novotny *ad* 341 E 1), and the word *ποῖόν τι*, denoting the *quale* in contrast to the *quid*, naturally occurs in the dialogues (Novotny *ad* 342 E 2; see also R. S. Bluck, “Plato's Biography,” *Philos. Review*, 58, 1949, pp. 503 ff., and his commentary *ad* 342 C). Still, in the letter the words have the appearance of almost a philosophical formula, and as such they occur only later, as is admitted by Novotny. The term *ἐξίς ψυχῆς*, however, is Platonic (contrary to Müller [p. 259, note 20]; see Stenzel [*A.J.P.*, 1953, p. 396], who also deals with Müller's objection [p. 267] to *φύσις* and *ἐπιχείρησις*).

<sup>106)</sup> Concerning the Academic rejection of the transcendence of Ideas, the minimizing of dialectics, and the stress on ethics, see Zeller, II, 1<sup>4</sup>, pp. 995 f. It should be mentioned that according to Sextus Empiricus (*Hyp. Pyrrh.*, I, 234) a rumor was current to the effect that Arcesilaus' scepticism was



Finally, under Xenocrates, the Academy began to work out an official version of Platonism. Xenocrates seems to have considered his teaching "just what Plato really meant." Thus, in the letter, Plato appears as the head of a school, as a scholarch. From now on, the only road to be followed is the one he has discovered.<sup>107)</sup>

One should like to be able to go further and to associate the work of the forger with specific teachings of his great contemporaries or the opinions proposed in the pseudo-Platonic dialogues. But the material for comparison is sparse and one arrives at merely negative conclusions. Nevertheless, it seems worthwhile to record the few observations one can make, since in this way the individuality of the author of the Seventh Letter is perhaps set into sharper relief.

Thus, while according to Aristotle Plato's philosophy is indebted to the philosophy of the Pythagorean mathematicians (*Metaphysics*, I, 6, 987 a 31, b 11), the epistle emphasizes his relation to the Pythagorean acousmatics. As Plato himself had asserted, Pythagoras had shown "a way of life" (*Republic*, X, 600 A-B), and in the letter he too teaches "a doctrine and a life" (λόγον καὶ βίον, 328 A). And it is not by chance that he is shown to be a close friend of the statesman Archytas (338 C; 339 A, D; 350 A), who is one of the rulers of Tarentum (338 C; 339 D), and who according to tradition served seven times as their general (Diogenes Laertius, VIII, 79).<sup>108)</sup>

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feigned and that once the student had been tested and accepted, he was taught the true doctrine of Plato. The story may well be due to a later misunderstanding of Academic scepticism (F. Ueberweg-K. Praechter, *Die Philosophie d. Altertums*, 1926<sup>12</sup>, pp. 467 f.), yet if one recalls the testing of the pupil as described in the letter (340 B ff., see above, pp. 71 ff.) and the contention that the teaching of the truth is to be restricted to the few, Sextus' report sounds less improbable, though of course it may have originated with those who were later interested in defending the view that Platonism had an esoteric doctrine. The second *Alcibiades*, which was perhaps written in the time of Arcesilaus (L. Bickel, *Archiv f. Gesch. d. Philos.*, 17, 1904, pp. 460 ff.), praises the blessings of ignorance.

<sup>107)</sup> On the early Academy and its unorthodox attitude toward Plato's philosophy, see Cherniss, *The Riddle of the Early Academy*, pp. 60 ff., especially 84 f.; on Xenocrates, p. 44, and below, p. 163.

<sup>108)</sup> It is of course true that Archytas, whom the letter mentions—in addition to an otherwise unknown Archedemus, most highly esteemed by Plato (339 A)—was famous for his mathematical studies, and it is usual to consider Archytas Plato's mentor in mathematics (Zeller, II, 1<sup>4</sup>, p. 411). But Aristoxenus, to whom the author of the Seventh Letter is indebted also in other respects, spoke of him as a general and praised him as exemplifying all virtues (Frs. 48; 50 [Wehrli]). Strabo (p. 280 [Archytas A 4 (Diels-Kranz)])

More important are the author's deviations from Speusippus as well as from Xenocrates in his philosophical outlook. Demanding a knowledge that embraces "at the same time both what is false and true of the whole existence" (344 B), the letter does not seek it, as did the first successor of Plato, through a method of definition, through a "teaching concerning the resemblances in science" (Dio- genes Laertius, IV, 5 = Speusippus Fr. 1 [Lang]).<sup>109</sup> Xenocrates, on the other hand, connected metaphysics more closely with theology and designated the Monad as the first male deity or Zeus or Nous; the Dyad, as a goddess, the mother of the gods (Aetius, *Plac.*, I, 7, 30 = Fr. 15 [Heinze]). Such religious overtones are completely absent from the letter.<sup>110</sup>

Again, when the *Epinomis* tries to specify those subjects worth studying for the future philosopher, of which Plato had said in the *Laws* merely that they were "not incapable of description" (ἀπρόρρητα) but were "incapable of prescription" (ἀπρόρρητα, XII, 968 E), it stresses the importance of scientific knowledge and especially of the knowledge of astronomy. The author of the Seventh Letter does not share the enthusiasm for scientific insight felt by the continuator of the *Laws*.<sup>111</sup> The autobiography is more sceptical about all human learning. Yet its scepticism is unlike the scepticism of the *Sisyphus*, which holds that with regard to political

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says that Tarentum enjoyed a very democratic regime. I note that other sources mention Plato's opposition to Archytas on the ground that he tried to solve mathematical problems with instruments and by mechanical means (Plutarch, *Quaest. Conv.*, VIII, 2, 1 = A 15 [Diels-Kranz]).

<sup>109</sup> For the relationship between Speusippus and the Seventh Letter, see above, note 75. I mention in passing that the utter condemnation of the significance of names (343 A-B) is, if not directed against Heracleides of Pontus, at least at variance with his views, and perhaps with the interest the early Academy seems to have shown in etymology (Cicero, *Acad. Post.*, I, 8, 32; see M. Warburg, "Zwei Fragen zum 'Kratylos,'" *Neue Philologische Untersuchungen*, 5, 1929, pp. 86 f.).

<sup>110</sup> But see above, pp. 27; 113.

<sup>111</sup> The passage just quoted has been compared by Ritter (see England, *ad* 968 E 2) with Epistle VII, 341 C-D, but actually, it contains "the explicit repudiation of secrecy of doctrine" and implies only that the Academy had its own method of teaching (G. Vlastos, *Gnomon*, 35, 1963, p. 651, in his review of H. J. Krämer, *Arete bei Platon und Aristoteles*, 1959; what he says also refutes Müller's claim [p. 262, note 26] that there is "Geheimnistuerei" in the *Laws*). The reasons given by Zeller and others for the spuriousness of the *Epinomis* have, in my opinion, not been refuted by J. Harward, *The Epinomis of Plato*, 1928, pp. 26 ff. For the letter's concept of "liberal" education, see below, p. 163.

insight man cannot possibly deliberate about the best course to follow. For the future is unknown to him and he does not know at what he is aiming; nor can a distinction be made between the good advisor and the bad advisor (390 C). The epistle is full of good advice and quite certain of what is bad advice. Nor does it share the scepticism of the *Demodocus*, which arises from the fact that there are "twin arguments" (δισσοὶ λόγοι) about all things to be investigated, so that one does not know whom to trust (386 C).<sup>112</sup> For although the letter admits that reason cannot meet all arguments one can bring against the position it upholds, that the inner certainty of the soul cannot be conveyed in words, it insists on the certainty of perfect knowledge, which is vouchsafed to man by the mystic experience. But such a mysticism, such an illumination, again, is a far cry from the belief in the divine voice, the private oracle, which according to the *Theages* speaks through Socrates, a revelation for the sake of which the pupil might wish "to live with [Socrates]" (συνεῖναι, 127 A; συνουσία, 130 E), even to live with him in the same house, "sitting next to him, clinging to him, and touching him" (130 E), for in this way one would learn most. Nor does the soul find itself in the soul of another, through the *eros* of the teacher which evokes the *eros* of the pupil; true education is not founded upon the personal relationship between the two, as the first *Alcibiades* has it (133 B; 135 D).<sup>113</sup> According to the letter, the "living together" (συνουσίας) is living together with the object of philosophy. True friendship that can be trusted comes from

<sup>112</sup> Cf. above, pp. 24 ff. and note 80. The letter shows a certain scepticism in its evaluation of the knowledge derived from the Four (cf. Müller, *Archiv. f. Gesch. d. Philos.*, 1948, p. 254) and perhaps also in its evaluation of writing, and of the Platonic dialogues in particular (above, note 33). But one must remember that the *Parmenides* is not only the fountain head of Neoplatonism, but can be thought of as containing the sceptic suspension of judgment (Grote, *Plato*, II, p. 301). On the *Sisyphus* and the *Demodocus* as sceptical, see Shorey, *What Plato Said*, pp. 440 f. I need hardly add that the comparison I have made between the letter and other doctrines takes into account only what I consider characteristic differences. Nor have I tried to include all the pseudo-Platonic literature. There is, for instance, a rather interesting difference between the picture of the life after death as given in the *Axiochus* and that given in the letter. While according to the dialogue one enjoys the possession of the truth, according to the letter the soul is punished for its misdeeds.

<sup>113</sup> On the *Theages*, see Friedländer, II<sup>2</sup>, pp. 134 ff. (who considers the dialogue, if not genuine, then composed around 400 [p. 142]), and on the *Alcibiades*, the same, II<sup>2</sup>, pp. 213 ff. (I am not convinced by his renewed defense of the Platonic origin of the work [notes 8-13; pp. 318 ff.].)

"association in liberal education," not from "kinship of soul or body" (344 B); the pleasure "miscalled by the name of the Goddess of Love" is "slavish and graceless" (335 B). The pupil, while learning, should seek "to associate [with his teacher]" (συγγίγνεσθαι, 330 B), but for what he has received, he owes reverence or respect (αἰδοῖ, 340 A; cf. 337 A); what the teacher resents is disrespect (ἡτίμασε, 345 C; cf. ἐσέβετο ἐμοί, 344 D; ἡδέσθη, 350 C). The *eros* of the epistle is "the *eros* of the best life" (339 E).<sup>114</sup>

It is, then, quite impossible to relate the author of the letter to any of the great representatives of the Academy or to the men who wrote some of the more outstanding pseudo-Platonic dialogues. He surely stands against the tendency fashionable in his time to mathematize philosophy, of which Aristotle complains (*Metaphysics*, I, 9, 992 a 32f.).<sup>115</sup> One can only affiliate him with those who believed that the soul is the place of the Ideas. Were the evidence concerning the first and second generations after Plato not so scanty, one might be able to find out more. Under the circumstances, one must resign oneself to classifying him as a Platonist of sorts, whose name and background are unknown. But since he himself forfeited any claim to glory by writing in the name of Plato, perhaps he would be satisfied to remain one of those anonymous Platonists to whom Aristotle occasionally refers, introducing a quotation from their works with the words: "Some say" (οἱ δέ [*Metaphysics*, XIV, 1, 1088 a 15]), or "someone else says" (ἄλλος δέ τις [XIII, 6, 1080 b 21]).<sup>116</sup> No doubt, there were among them men with the learning and insight which speak so clearly from the letter. As one has said with regard to other pseudo-Platonic writings whose authors are unknown and whose content represents an original development of the Platonic position, "there were surely other Athenians

<sup>114</sup>) The term *ἔρω* in 339 E—which, if I am not mistaken, occurs only here—seems to be contrasted with the *ἐπισθυμία* of philosophy characteristic of Dionysius (345 D; cf. 328 A; 338 B). The distinction is perhaps identical with that between the philosopher who is truly inflamed by philosophy (340 B) and the pretender to knowledge who is merely sunburnt on the surface (D). The words in which the letter describes the relationships between pupil and teacher confirm, I think, the assumption that the letter also sees Plato's relation to Dion differently from the Platonic epigram (above, p. 65 note 150).

<sup>115</sup>) On the importance of mathematics for the early Academy, see Zeller, II, 1<sup>4</sup>, pp. 1032-34.

<sup>116</sup>) For more such passages, see W. D. Ross' Introduction to his edition of Ar. *Metaphysics* (I, 1924, pp. LXIII f.).

of that day beside Plato and Aristotle capable of writing a thoughtful philosophical essay." <sup>117)</sup>

For, to say it once more, the philosophical digression is just such a thoughtful philosophical essay, although it is not the work of Plato. It was unfortunate that this was denied immediately when, in the eighteenth century, the first attacks upon the genuineness of the Platonic letters were made by men like Meiners, a typical representative of the enlightenment, and Ast, the classicist inspired by the new historical consciousness of his generation. The nineteenth century, almost unanimous in acknowledging the letters as spurious, branded them as inane and unphilosophic, and they did not fare better at the hands of critics of the early twentieth century. <sup>118)</sup> A mere glance at the names of those who in previous times had accepted the Seventh Letter as the work of Plato should have prevented such an evaluation of its content. Plotinus and Proclus, in antiquity, Ficino and Cudworth in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, were not easily deceived about the merit of a philosophical document. <sup>119)</sup>

But it is fair to add that the founders of Neoplatonism and their later followers appreciated the philosophy of the Seventh Letter because it foreshadows their own doctrine. In opposing the defenders of the genuineness of the letter in his time, Kant charged that they were using its authority to support their new romantic philosophy which is at the opposite pole from his critical philosophy, itself a reassertion of Platonic transcendence. <sup>120)</sup> Perhaps it is due to the revival of a romantic and sceptical mysticism that recently the letter has again found favor with so many, that the true Platonic spirit is discovered in the autobiography rather than in the *Republic* or in any other of the great dialogues. And yet, the examination of the philosophical attitude presented in the letter leads to the same result at which one arrives in examining the historical report.

<sup>117)</sup> Shorey, *What Plato Said*, p. 408.

<sup>118)</sup> Meiners (*Abh. Gött*, 1783, V, 51 ff.) regarded all the letters as spurious; Tennemann and I. G. Schlosser (*Platos Briefe über die syrakus. Staatsrevolution*, 1795) defended their genuineness. It is Schlosser, the friend of Jacoby, that Kant turned against in his essay, and he has in mind also Fichte's restatement of critical philosophy.

<sup>119)</sup> I have taken the data mentioned in the text from Geffcken (*Griech. Literaturgesch.*, II, Anmerkungen, pp. 56 f.), who gives the best survey of the later history of the letter.

<sup>120)</sup> The background of Kant's essay has been discussed by A. O. Lovejoy, *The Reason, the Understanding and Time*, 1961, pp. 8 ff.

Judged on the basis of what is known about Plato from the dialogues, the philosophical digression is unplatonic, just as the account of the events that took place appears to be spurious when compared with what is known from other sources. The Plato of the Seventh Letter is at most a *Plato dimidiatus*, a halved Plato, as Plotinus has been called, who, like the author of the letter, was an intellectual mystic and a fervent believer in political action. <sup>121)</sup>

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<sup>121)</sup> W. Theiler, "Plotin zwischen Plato und Stoa," in *Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique* (Fondation Hardt) V, 1960, p. 67.

### III

#### THE OTHER PLATONIC LETTERS IN THEIR RELATION TO THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Considered both in its own right and in relation to the Platonic dialogues, the Seventh Letter appears to be spurious. But it is only one of thirteen Platonic letters traditionally attached to Plato's works. Sometimes it is claimed that they are all by the same hand and that their author follows a certain plan.<sup>1)</sup> Whether this is so or not, the fact remains that the *apologia* is part of a collection of Platonic letters, that those who made the collection or integrated it into the Platonic *corpus* must have had reasons for doing so, and one might consequently argue that it is impossible to reject the authenticity of any of the documents without studying its relation to the others and accounting for the existence of the collection as a whole.<sup>2)</sup> Moreover, while not long ago hardly any of the letters except the seventh were considered to be genuine, the situation has changed greatly during recent decades. More and more of the epistles begin to be attributed to Plato.<sup>3)</sup> It could well be, therefore, that they provide a standard by which the content of the *apologia* can and must be judged, especially since they have much to tell about Plato's political and philosophical thought, and since some of them are even addressed to Dionysius and other participants in the Sicilian affairs. For all these reasons, an investigation of the Seventh Letter would not be complete unless one tried to determine its position within the entire collection of the Platonic epistles.

But in doing so, the interpreter obviously cannot do full justice to each of the letters. An adequate analysis of them would require

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<sup>1)</sup> E. Dornseiff, "Platons Buch 'Briefe'," *Hermes*, 64, 1934, pp. 223 ff. (He asserted that such a plan exists even after he came to the conclusion that the letters are spurious [*Echtheitsfragen antik-griechischer Literatur*, 1939, p. 31].)

<sup>2)</sup> Cf. Field, *Plato and his Contemporaries*, p. 199. Karsten, too, thought such a comparison necessary (p. 19).

<sup>3)</sup> Taylor maintains that all but two letters are genuine (*Plato*, p. 7) and J. Burnet, all but the first (*Platonism*, 1928, p. 68). The case for the advocates of the authenticity of the letters has been stated most recently by Friedländer, I<sup>2</sup>, pp. 245 ff.

an investigation by itself. One must, and I think can, restrict oneself to those questions which have a decisive bearing on the interpretation of the autobiography. That is, one need only determine whether the letters present a view of Plato's political activities and in particular of his Sicilian voyage which is identical with that offered in the Seventh Epistle. If that were the case, one would have to explain why the forged letter came to be the canon of judgment on Plato's life. If it turns out that the various letters differ in their picture of Plato, this divergency would throw into sharper relief the version of the story presented in the *apologia*, and perhaps make it possible to conjecture the origin of the collection. It is true, one cannot confront the Seventh Letter with the other letters in regard to every detail. None of them covers as much ground as the autobiography. Still there are enough points of comparison, I trust, to allow for conclusions unlikely to be overthrown by a further scrutiny of the individual letters.

#### I. THE LETTERS TO PHILOSOPHERS AND STATESMEN OUTSIDE THE SICILIAN CIRCLE

To start with the group of letters whose addressees are outside the Sicilian circle and whose impact upon the issues of the autobiography is thus more indirect, the *Sixth* advises Hermias, the tyrant of Atarneus, to listen to the counsel of two Platonists who are his neighbors. He can benefit by their wisdom, while they can gain from him the practical experience which they still need "owing to the fact that they have spent a large part of their lives in company with us who are men of moderation and free from vice" (322 E). This practical knowledge, the possession of which will make the friendship (cf. 323 B) among the three mutually beneficent, is described as "the science which is a safeguard in dealing with the wicked and unjust, and a kind of self-defensive power" (D).

The letter has found favor with many modern interpreters.<sup>4)</sup> But none of the dialogues ever proposes that political science could be derived from mere experience or contrasts such a science with phi-

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<sup>4)</sup> Cf. Friedländer, I<sup>2</sup>, p. 355, note 12. The genuineness of the letter has become more widely acknowledged since A. Brinckmann showed that what is said about Hermias is historically correct (*Rh. Mus.*, 66, 1911, pp. 226 ff.; see also Jaeger, *Aristoteles*, p. 112). But the fact that the data referred to in the letter are historical surely does not prove the Platonic origin of the document (see above, p. 2).



losophical wisdom, as does the letter. The philosopher is to be king, or the king to be a philosopher. It is the ruler who is in need of the philosophical advisor, while the latter is not in need of help from the former. Even the Seventh Letter advocates, in the truly Platonic manner, that actual power and theoretical wisdom be allied in the same person (335 D; cf. 326 A-B).<sup>5)</sup> Moreover, the Sixth Letter imposes an oath to be sworn "by the God that is Ruler of all that is and that shall be," and "by the Lord and Father of the Ruler and Cause, Whom, if we are real philosophers, we shall know truly so far as men well-fortuned can" (323 D). The Seventh Letter is free of any reference to such religious overtones in Plato's philosophy.<sup>6)</sup> Finally, the Sixth Letter uses the term "Idea" (322 D), which the Seventh studiously avoids. In fact, Plato's doctrine is called "this fair science of Ideas." In connection with the concept of seriousness, the Sixth Letter mentions that of playfulness—"the sister to earnestness" (323 D [cf. *Laws*, VI, 761 D; VII, 803 C])—which does not appear in the *apologia*. Only in one respect do the two documents agree: in both, Plato is aware of the respect (αἰδοῖ, 323 B) that is his due. But surely this is not sufficient ground on which to identify the author of the Sixth Letter with the author of the Seventh.<sup>7)</sup>

The *Fifth Letter* deals with a problem with which the Seventh

<sup>5)</sup> Cf. above, p. 52. According to Plato, philosophy spares men the pain of learning through experience (above, p. 10). Attributing to experience a value of its own, the Sixth Letter implies an antithesis of theoretical and practical insight (cf. 322 E, where it is said that Plato's pupils "need these additional qualities so that they may not be compelled to neglect the true science and to pay more attention than is right to that which is human and necessitated"). Bury (*Prefatory Note*, p. 454) compares the position taken in the Sixth Letter with the Second Letter (310 E). But there it is merely said that it is natural for men of wisdom and men of power to associate (see below, p. 134).

<sup>6)</sup> Cf. above, p. 116. The religious concepts of the Sixth Letter have, from early times, seemed to foreshadow the Christian dogma (Novotny *ad* 323 D 2, p. 138, and below, note 35).

<sup>7)</sup> On the omission of the terms "playfulness" and "Ideas", see above, pp. 83; 85; concerning the term αἰδώς, above, p. 118. The latter term indicates that Plato is seen as head of the school, and it is for this reason, I think, that in cases of dispute the decision is to be left to him (323 B). The same is said in Epistle II (313 D; see also 310 D), which, again like the Sixth Letter, charges the addressees to read over the epistle frequently (compare 314 C with 323 C [see Bury, *loc. cit.*]). (The disagreement about the reading of καίπερ γέρων ὦν [cf. Jaeger, *Aristoteles*, pp. 177 f.; Novotny, *ad* 322 d 6; Friedländer, I<sup>2</sup>, p. 355, note 12] does not affect the statement concerning the theory of Ideas itself, and therefore I do not discuss it here.)

is also concerned. Why did Plato not participate at all in Athenian politics? Since he wants Perdiccas, the king of Macedon, to learn "the speech of monarchy" (321 E)—no one can be a true statesman without knowing the language of the respective constitutions of the state of which he is in charge (cf. *Republic*, VI, 493 A-C)—and since he seems to claim "to know what is of advantage to democracy," one may wonder why "he has never yet stood up and made a speech" (322 A). The answer is: "Plato was born late in the history of his country and he found the *demos* already old and habituated by the previous statesmen to do many things at variance with his own counsel" (A-B). So, believing that he could do no good, he did not wish to run risks in vain. The situation was in his opinion incurable (ἀνιάτως, B).

But according to the Seventh Letter, Plato's attitude toward Athens was not so intransigent from the beginning, nor was his judgment always that pessimistic. In his youth, he was willing to take an active part in the aristocratic as well as in the democratic government. Both disappointed him through their wrong-doing, but he admits that the regime of the Thirty within a short time "caused men to look back on the former (democratic) government as a golden age" (324 D) and that the restored democracy exercised "no little moderation" (325 B). It is true, the old customs were decaying; the written laws were corrupted (D-E). Plato learned to be more cautious: as he says when he discusses in general terms the attitude of the sensible man toward his own state, "if it appears to him to be ill-governed, he ought to speak if so be that his speech is not likely to prove fruitless nor to cause his death" (331 C-D). But, while according to the Fifth Letter Athenian democracy was incurable, the Seventh says no more than that in all the existing states "the state of their laws is such as to be *almost* incurable (σχεδὸν ἀνιάτως) without some marvellous over-hauling and good luck to boot" (326 A). After all, the Seventh Letter as well as the dialogues propose remedies for corrupt states. It is the essence of Platonic politics to advocate a programme which will bring "cessation from evils," in the Seventh Letter as well as in the *Republic*.<sup>8)</sup>

<sup>8)</sup> The Seventh Letter has hopes even for a change in Sicily, despite the fact that the "Sicilian life" is contemptible, and men, having lived for decades under a tyranny, have been corrupted by dissension (326 B; 329 B). Most interpreters consider the Fifth Letter spurious (the literature is surveyed by Harward, pp. 183 f., whose own defense of the genuineness of the

The last letter in this group, the *Eleventh*, which is addressed to Laodamas the mathematician and statesman, presumes to state in a few words how one can establish and preserve a lawful constitution. In addition to the laws, it holds, "there must be some authority in the state which supervises the daily life of both slaves and freemen to see that it is both temperate and manly" (359 A). If such supervision is of decisive importance and epitomizes, as it were, the political advice Plato has to offer, it is incomprehensible that it not even be mentioned in passing in the many references to the subject in the Seventh Letter. Though the autobiography asserts that states cannot flourish if their citizens live the life of pleasure (326 C-D), it recognizes as a precondition for the stability of government only obedience to the laws (337 C) and avoidance of bloodshed and persecution (e.g. 336 E-337 A). Nor is the stipulation laid down in the Eleventh Letter faithful to the spirit of the dialogues. Life in the best state as well as in the second best is no doubt regulated strictly. But not even the Nocturnal Council of the *Laws* is charged with supervising every move of the citizens.<sup>9)</sup>

Furthermore, Laodamas is told that if he has among his people men worthy of exercising such authority everything will work out well. If he has not, nothing can be done since he does not possess a trainer to train the supervisor, nor pupils to be trained. "So it only remains for you to pray to the gods" (359 B). Now, both the Plato of the Seventh Letter and the Plato of the dialogues are not averse to recommending prayers where "with men it is impossible."<sup>10)</sup> But since the Seventh Epistle asks that men be invited

epistle in my opinion is unconvincing). The language "used about counsel looks very much like the work of a later composer who had Epistle VII, 330 C ff., before him" (Bury, *Prefatory Note*, p. 449). Moreover, the explanation of Plato's failure to participate in politics is perhaps suggested by Epistle VII, 325 D, where it is said in explanation of Plato's political withdrawal that "it was not easy to find [friends and trusty companions] ready to hand, since our State was no longer managed according to the principles and institutions of our forefathers." The author of the Fifth Letter states the same point in a manner more typical of the believer in the "ancestral constitution."

<sup>9)</sup> Cf. *Laws*, XII, 962 B. Harward considers "the central point in the constitution" recommended in the *Republic* as well as in the *Laws* to be the establishment of an authority such as the letter proposes. But the "overseer" (ἐπιστάτης) of the *Republic* (III, 412 A) is an anticipation of the philosophical ruler, and corresponds to the Nocturnal Council (see Shorey *ad loc.*), and his function is merely to prevent innovations, for instance, in music and gymnastics (IV, 424 B). Incidentally, Bury compares 359 A with Epistle VII, 326 C-D; but this passage does not speak of any supervising authority.

<sup>10)</sup> Cf. above, p. 27.

from abroad to write the new laws (337 C), it can be supposed that its author would have advised Laodamas to invite an advisor from a foreign country. The Socrates of the dialogues encourages his pupils to search, after his death, for a teacher even among the barbarians (*Phaedo*, 78 A). According to the *Laws*, it is the duty of the state to follow the trail of good men "over sea and land"; without a search of this kind, which would make it possible to test the constitution of the city by what one can learn from others, "no scheme of polity is perfectly stable" (XII, 951 B-C). <sup>11)</sup>

Last but not least, the Eleventh Letter claims that the earliest communities obtained good constitutions through prayers to the gods, or that "they came to have a good constitution at a later date, as a result of being confronted with great troubles either through war or other difficulties, whenever there arose in their midst a man of noble character in possession of great power" (359 B). This philosophy of history seems utterly unplatonic. Nowhere does the author of the dialogues assert that a constitution falls from heaven, as it were. It is "mind (reflection) which is law," as he says, playing on the etymology of mind (νοῦς) and law (νόμος, IV, 714 A), which gradually brings about sound political rule. <sup>12)</sup> Likewise, the author of the Seventh Letter sees salvation in philosophical thought and ethical conduct. A man of noble character (ἀνὴρ καλός τε καὶ ἀγαθός) acting in response to a crisis is not the philosopher-king whom the *Republic* demands nor even the ruler praised in the Seventh Epistle who undergoes philosophical training while discharging his duties. <sup>13)</sup>

With regard to all three letters, then, there is no reason to assume that they are genuine. The only agreement they show with the Seventh Letter is that they share the concept of a Plato who is as

<sup>11)</sup> The passage just quoted, better than any other, illustrates the undogmatic character of Plato's views, even in his old age (see my forthcoming essay, "Plato's Political Theory").

<sup>12)</sup> For the historical development of the arts and sciences and the rise of the various forms of polity, see *Laws*, III, 678 A ff. The factors that make for improvement are time and intellect. Even where divine Providence created especially favorable conditions, as in the case of the Spartan constitution, human intelligence "did its work" afterwards (691 D-E).

<sup>13)</sup> Cf. above, p. 72. Modern critics are divided in their judgment on the genuineness of the letter, though the majority appears to deny it (see Harvard's survey on the issue; he is probably right in saying (p. 228) that the phrase *περὶ ἀσθενείαν* [358 E] does not prove that the epistle is unplatonic [contrary to Bury], but as far as I can see, he has failed to refute the other arguments in favor of the spuriousness of the document).

much a statesman as he is a theoretical philosopher, if not a statesman first and a philosopher second. But the agreement is on the problems to be dealt with rather than on the solutions proposed. To be sure, the deviations one finds are sometimes slight. Were it certain that the letters were composed by the same author, one might be inclined to attribute such differences in judgment as one finds on Athenian democracy or in the terminology of the theory of Ideas to changes in mood or circumstances, or to the lapse of time. As things stand, these variations, together with the clear discrepancies in the evaluation of important issues suggest that topics of interest are taken up by various authors and enlarged in accordance with their own view of Plato, either independently, or with reference to what is said in the Seventh Letter. It remains to be seen whether the other letters confirm or refute such a hypothesis.

## 2. LETTERS TO ARCHYTAS AND DION

To turn now to the first group of letters written to those who had a share in the Sicilian drama, the *Ninth* and the *Twelfth* are addressed to Archytas. Like the Seventh (338 C; 350 A), they attest Plato's friendship with the Pythagorean ruler of Tarentum. But the Twelfth Letter, a short note of thanks for treatises sent by Archytas, also announces that Plato is sending Archytas treatises of his own which are not as yet completed, "just in the state in which they happen to be" (360 D). It is not very likely that the Plato of the autobiography, who never wrote down his truly serious thoughts, would have taken his writings seriously enough to send them to a fellow philosopher, especially in an unfinished state. Nor can one imagine the author of the *Republic* doing so. The ancient critics may have had other reasons for their rejection of the document, but they were surely right in considering it spurious. <sup>14)</sup>

<sup>14)</sup> The epistle is preserved by Diogenes Laertius together with the letter of Archytas which Plato answers (VIII, 80). Both are usually considered forgeries by the author of the writings of the Pythagorean Okellos, whose works Archytas, according to his letter, sends to Plato, while the Platonic letter thanks him for books without naming their author (359 C-D). Novotny (pp. 280 f.) thinks that the Platonic epistle gave rise to the invention of the letter of Archytas, and so does Taylor (*apud* Harward, p. 230). Harward is of the opinion that "there is nothing in the letter itself which need give grounds for suspicion" (p. 229). As I have tried to argue, this is not the case. Even if the Eleventh Letter were independent of the letter attributed to

The Ninth Letter attempts to relieve Archytas' distress about the pressure of his public obligations. It admits that to attend to one's own business is "the pleasantest thing," especially if one is a philosopher (357 E), but it reminds Archytas that "one share of our existence belongs to our country, another to our parents, a third to the rest of our friends, while a great part is given over to those needs of the hour with which our life is beset" (358 A). Cicero apparently delighted in quoting these words (*De officiis*, I, 7, 22; *De finibus*, II, 14, 45). Admirable as their spirit is, they can hardly have been written by Plato, the champion of the ideal of theoretical life. He might have agreed that man is not born for himself, that instinctive self-love and self-seeking must be eradicated from his heart; but he would hardly have admitted that man is born for his family and his friends, or for the duties of the hour. And he conceded a claim on its citizens only to that city which had brought them up properly.<sup>15</sup> Even the Plato of the Seventh Letter does not go as far as does the writer of the Ninth. He does, to be sure, believe that the philosopher must partake in active politics (331 A). But he leaves his occupation which is "anything but ignoble" (329 B) because he cannot bear all his life to be "nothing more than a mere word" (328 C), because he hopes to serve philosophy by giving help to his Sicilian friends. Such a justification of the demands of the practical life is by far more restrained in tone and substance than the one given in the Ninth Letter.<sup>16</sup>

The *Fourth Letter* is addressed to Dion. It is ostensibly written after Dion has overthrown Dionysius. Plato has heard of the jealous rivalry that exists between his friend, and Heracleides, Theodotes,

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Archytas, it could easily be explained as an attempt to show that Plato came into the possession of "Pythagorean" books through Archytas; his dependence on Pythagorean material was a favorite topic of discussion beginning with Dicaearchus (Plutarch, *Quaest. Conv.*, VIII, 2 = Fr. 41 [Wehrli]) and Aristoxenus (Diogenes Laertius, III, 37 = Fr. 67 [Wehrli]); cf. also Zeller, II, 1<sup>4</sup>, p. 410. Some conjectures concerning the ancients' reasons for rejecting the authenticity of the letter have been made by Howald (pp. 17 f.).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. above, p. 17. Furthermore, the Seventh Letter does not mention that an additional advantage of assuming office is the prevention of the reign of bad people (358 B), an assertion recalling Republic, I, 347 C. In some respects, the Ninth Letter shares the point of view of the Thirteenth; see below, p. 132.

<sup>16</sup> Its characterization of Plato is, of course, still more different from the picture of the theoretical philosopher found in the biographical tradition; see above, p. 8. The letter is almost generally athetized and considered, as Bury puts it, "a colourless and commonplace effusion" (*Prefatory Note*). Harward, I think, is the only one to judge the epistle "delightful" (p. 226).

and the other notables, and admonishes him "to play the part of a physician" so that "things will turn out best for you all" (320 E). This admonition, which is preceded by the expression of Plato's interest in Dion's cause, by words of encouragement for him, and by a statement on the greatness of his task (320 A-D), is followed by a warning. Plato asks Dion "to bear in mind that you are thought by some to be unduly wanting in affability; so do not forget that successful action depends on pleasing people, whereas arrogance (αὐθάδεια) is next neighbor to isolation" (321 B).

In recalling the Seventh Letter, one is perhaps not astonished to find that Plato should want Dion to please people. One is surprised, however, to learn that Plato should feel it necessary to tell Dion that he is suspected of arrogance. For he would not have made himself the bearer of this accusation had he not believed that it contained a kernel of truth. And if this was true in 360, how could he write in 357 that Dion was just, courageous, temperate and wisdom-loving (336 B)? Had Dion been such a man, he would not have been suspected of arrogance, either by Plato or by others. If the Seventh Letter allows for any flaw in Dion's character, it is his inability to realize the folly and depravity of his enemies (353 D-E).<sup>17)</sup>

Now, one may of course say that after Dion's death Plato forgot, or chose to forget, his friend's failings. The memory that stayed with him, that he wished to conjure up for others, was the memory of a noble friend. But this would be too easy an explanation. For the Fourth Letter not only sees Dion differently from the Seventh; it also represents Plato's attitude toward Dion's "deed" in a different manner. While in the autobiography Plato asserts that he kept out of Dion's war against Dionysius, he declares in the Fourth Letter that "it has been plain, I believe, all along that I took a keen interest in the operations that have been carried out, and that I was most anxious to see them finally completed" (320 A). Were the author of the Seventh Letter and the author of the Fourth Letter the same man, he would, then, have seriously contradicted himself with regard to his own attitude.<sup>18)</sup>

<sup>17)</sup> Even the assertion that Plato "could have easily restrained Dion, had Dionysius kept his promise to return Dion's money" (350 E; cf. above, p. 45) emphasizes Dion's fundamentally good character; he "resolved to suffer rather than to do unholy deeds—although guarding himself against so suffering" (351 C).

<sup>18)</sup> This change in regard to Plato's participation in Dion's war, pointed out by Bury in his *Prefatory Note*, is reflected also in the letters addressed to

A remark of Plutarch's suggests another solution. He calls Plato's statement on Dion's arrogance "almost prophetic" (*Dion*, 8, 3). And it certainly is so if one assumes that things happened as Plutarch, and not the Seventh Letter, describes them. For the rivalry between Dion and the Sicilian leaders lead to the assassination of Heraclides, to which Dion agreed. While the Syracusans, despite their resentment of the deed, accepted it as unavoidable (53, 3), the rivals of Dion did not. The slaying of Heraclides in the end resulted in Dion's death at the hands of Callippus (54). The Fourth Letter itself expresses concern about what is going to happen. "Now for the present (God willing) affairs are going well," it says; "but it is in the future that the chief struggle lies" (320 B). It seems most likely, therefore, that the letter was composed by one who believed, as does Plutarch, that Dion "dealt with those who sought his aid more rudely and harshly than was needful in public life" (8, 2); that it was not Plato who wrote him "on this subject" (3), but someone who disagreed with the account given in the Seventh Letter of Dion and Dion's death, someone for whom Plato's friend was not the innocent victim of a plot of false friends.<sup>19)</sup>

If the Fourth Letter seems to have been written in opposition to claims made in the Seventh, the *Tenth* appears to have been composed in support of the version given in the autobiography. Addressed to Aristodorus, a companion of Dion, the letter identifies "genuine philosophy" with moral qualities—steadfastness, trustiness and sincerity (358 C). Aristodorus, one of the most intimate of Dion's friends, exhibits this philosophic disposition best of all. It is obvious, then, that Dion chose his friends in the right way; he was wont to live with men of the highest merit; he owed his friends to what the autobiography would call "association in liberal edu-

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Dionysius (below, note 38). Harward (p. 228) argues that the discrepancy between the attitudes taken in the two letters can be explained by the time which has elapsed since the writing of the Seventh Letter. But the two reasons given for Plato's decision to keep out of Dion's enterprise are his age and his gratitude to the tyrant for saving his life, and such reasons do not become less binding in time.

<sup>19)</sup> Concerning Plutarch's version of what happened, see above, p. 45 (and also Aristotle's testimony [above, p. 46]). When Plato prays that no one will show the symptoms of rivalry, but adds that "in case anyone should, after all, do so, you must play the part of a physician; and so things will turn out best for you all" (320 E), this could be an implied warning against the assassination of Heraclides. If so, it would strengthen the warning against arrogance which follows almost immediately.



cation" (334 B), to philosophy (333 E). Yet a definition of philosophy as narrow as that given in the letter is alien to the dialogues. It differs even from that proposed in the Seventh Letter. For though the autobiography insists on the moral strength the philosopher must have (e.g. 340 D; 344 A), it does not fail to stress the intellectual endowment required in addition.<sup>20</sup>

At this point, one begins to wonder whether the so-called collection of Platonic letters can really be called a collection of letters by Plato. None of the letters thus far scrutinized can be attributed to Plato himself with any degree of certainty. And again, it is evident that the views expressed on people and events echo positions that are in conflict with one another. Although the theme is identical, it is obviously developed and varied in accordance with different traditions, if not in accordance with the free play of historical imagination. It does not stand otherwise, I think, with the series of letters which I shall consider next and which are addressed to Plato's principal antagonist in the Sicilian drama.

### 3. LETTERS TO DIONYSIUS

Of the letters to Dionysius, the *Thirteenth*, purportedly composed after Plato's second trip to Sicily, is chronologically the earliest. It is written in a chatty style and deals with a medley of topics: news from Athens (363 B), suggestions for gifts to friends (363 A; C), affairs of state (362 E), philosophical advice and talk about philosophical books (360 B-C) and about philosophers (C-E). But the main subjects are clearly matters of money, either those of Plato or of Dionysius, for whom Plato acts as Athenian agent (361 A; 362 D).

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Bury, who says that despite such parallels as *Republic*, III, 409 D; VI, 499 A ff.; *Theaetetus*, 176 C, the definition of philosophy given in the Tenth Letter "is foreign to Plato's manner" (*Prefatory Note*). Harward insists that there are no grounds for suspecting the genuineness of the letter if the reader will remember what it is that he has before him, namely, "a mere scrap" (p. 227). But surely, one can expect even a "scrap" of Plato's to be Platonic in spirit. The reason for the invention of the letter may be that Dion's true friends are to be opposed to those who murdered him and were called his friends, but according to the Seventh Letter, were no friends at all (see above, p. 49). Incidentally, Diogenes Laertius quotes the letter as addressed to Aristodemus (III, 61). Aristodorus, as the letter calls the friend of Dion, is entirely unknown, and so is Aristodemus. Could the name be Archdemus, who is at least known from the Seventh Letter (below, note 74)?

I shall not ask whether Plato could possibly have been concerned with providing a dowry for his nieces—one of them “not yet a year old” (361 D)—or have reflected on how much he would have to pay for the tomb of his mother “in case she should die” (E). Were he the author of the Ninth Letter, this might well have been the case.<sup>21</sup> But it can hardly be the Plato of the Seventh Letter who speaks here as Dionysius’ business manager and banker, as it were. Not that the autobiography pictures Plato as innocent of financial affairs or contemptuous of them. He is accustomed to offering advice concerning the acquisition of wealth (331 A). He is willing, when asked by Dionysius, to act as a kind of trustee of Dion’s estate (346 B-47 C); had Dionysius not deprived Dion of his property, he thinks, there would have been no war between them (350 E). But he is obviously eager to point out that he is not financially indebted to Dionysius. He rejected the offers of honor and gifts of money by which the tyrant tried to persuade him to take his side (333 D); although Dionysius had promised to turn over to Plato half of Dion’s money to take home to Dion (347 D), Plato, when leaving, asked for none of this money, nor was any payment made to him (350 B). In the Thirteenth Letter, Plato admits that he has made use of Dion’s help and takes it for granted that charges which he cannot meet will fall upon Dionysius (361 E-362 A). In other words, he concedes that his relation to the Sicilian court is to his personal advantage.

The two letters are set apart even more strikingly by other features. The Thirteenth Epistle shows Plato as a close friend of Dionysius, so close indeed that he is willing to be the tyrant’s instrument in his political schemes against Dion (362 E).<sup>22</sup> Now there is no reason to doubt that in 367 Plato felt a certain friendship for Dionysius; otherwise he would not have promised to return once more, as he does according to the Seventh Letter (338 A). He was also aware that Dionysius wished to take Dion’s place, wished to be, “rather than Dion. . . my special friend”; he denies, however, that Dionysius chose “the best way to achieve this, if it

<sup>21</sup> Cf. above, p. 128 (part of one’s life belongs to one’s family).

<sup>22</sup> The letter itself does not mention the subject of Plato’s negotiations with Dion. But it is generally agreed that he talked to him about Dionysius’ demand that Dion divorce his wife (Plutarch, *Dion*, 21, 1). The issue is not, I think, whether Plato approves of Dionysius’ plan (Harward, *ad loc.*). It is inconsistent with his friendship with Dion that he would have anything at all to do with the scheme.

was to be achieved" (330 A), namely, by studying philosophy. The Plato of the Thirteenth Letter is sending Dionysius a number of treatises to further his philosophical studies (360 B-C); he encourages him to take lessons from a mathematician whom he recommends "in addition to your other studies in philosophy; but if not, get someone else thoroughly taught so that you may learn from him when you have leisure, and thereby make progress and gain glory—that, so the benefit you gain from me may still continue" (E). The Plato of the Seventh Letter contends that all he ever "taught" Dionysius, he taught him in the test he gave him on his third trip, and never mentions mathematical studies. He claims not to know from whom Dionysius learned his wisdom (338 D-E). He scolds him for his "love of glory," which prompted him to publish treatises on philosophy (344 E). Obviously, then, the Thirteenth Letter deviates from the Seventh. That it is not authentic, I think suffers no doubt.<sup>23</sup>)

The *First Letter* too contradicts the data presented in the Seventh Epistle. For here, Plato complains of the niggardliness of the tyrant, who, after all Plato had done for him, sent him away "with more ignominy than a beggar would deserve who had stayed with you for so long a time" (309 B). And he returns to him "the splendid sum of gold which you gave me for my journey home. . . For it was neither a sufficient sum for my journey nor was it otherwise useful for my support" (C). According to the Seventh Letter, Plato undoubtedly felt badly treated by Dionysius though they appeared to be comrades to the whole of Sicily (348 A); he must have resented the tyrant's breaking the promises he had made (*ibid.*; 349 B). He will not have put much trust in Dionysius' show of friendship at the end of his stay (E). But his acknowledgment of the fact that Dionysius provided supplies for his journey home is free of any complaint about their insufficiency (350 B). And he stresses the continuing debt of gratitude he owes the tyrant for saving his life, while the First Letter implies that Plato no longer considers himself bound

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<sup>23</sup>) That the Thirteenth Letter does not fit in perfectly with the picture of Plato one derives from the Seventh Letter (Field, p. 199) has, I trust, become clear. Most critics reject the genuineness of the Thirteenth Letter because it attributes to Plato a concern with realia, a pettiness which seems foreign to his genius (e.g. Bury, *Prefatory Note*). But the letter also has its defenders (Harward, pp. 230-34, and Morrow, pp. 100 ff.). On its relation to the Second Letter and on its origin, see below, pp. 144 f.

to Dionysius (310 B). <sup>24)</sup> Finally, the Seventh Letter never indicates that Plato had an active share in Dionysius' government. The First Letter claims that he "kept guard over your City as sole Dictator" (309 B; cf. A). And for this service he apparently expected to be paid handsomely in the end, just as in the Thirteenth Letter he regards financial rewards as the natural consequence of what he has done for Dionysius. <sup>25)</sup>

But it is not the only, not even the true purpose of the First Letter, I think, to give utterance to Plato's complaints about the inappropriate manner in which Dionysius has treated Plato. The letter devotes as much time to warning the tyrant that "when other fortunes befall you, 'Thou'lt pray for such a helper by thy side'" (309 D). To this line from Euripides, it adds other verses from tragedy showing that dying tyrants miss friends, not gold. It is not unreasonable to conjecture that the author of the letter was familiar with the fate of Dionysius, who was to live out his life in poverty and loneliness long after Plato's death. The letter, in the form of a warning to Dionysius, is, like the one addressed to Dion, a *vaticinium ex eventu*. <sup>26)</sup>

The *Second Letter*, also presumably written after Plato's return from his third trip, is in some respects a reversal of the attitude attributed to Plato in the Thirteenth Letter and even in the First. For after a short introduction in which Plato disclaims the reports according to which friends of his have spoken ill of Dionysius (310 B-D), he first sets forth what should be the proper relationship between the tyrant and himself, and as it turns out, it is just the opposite of what it is according to the First and Thirteenth Letters.

Though "it is natural for wisdom and great power to come together" (310 E), Plato insists that great care must be taken about the terms of such associations (C); they must be formed in the right manner. This means that if Dionysius thinks he can

<sup>24)</sup> Cf. above, p. 48. That such a contradiction exists has been pointed out e.g. by Bury and Post. Harward's translation of διημαρτηκώς, by which he tries to eliminate the discrepancy between the two letters ("that you have gone so far astray from me," p. 164), is not convincing.

<sup>25)</sup> The most that the Seventh Letter claims is that Plato, at least in the eyes of the people abroad and in Sicily, was on good terms with Dionysius (330 A; 348 A). The only direct interference referred to concerns the tyrant's quarrel with Heraclides (348 B ff.).

<sup>26)</sup> Cf. above, p. 130. As Field says, "the First Letter, as everyone admits, must be rejected" (p. 199; cf. note 3). Harward remains doubtful about its genuineness (p. 162).

find better teachers than Plato, he should "hold them in honor" (312 B). If he is content with Plato, he should honor him. And it is for Dionysius to lead the way. If he pays homage to Plato, Plato will pay homage to him. Otherwise he will keep to himself. For "if I honor you while you do not honor me, I shall be deemed to be a man who worships and pursues after wealth; and to such conduct everyone, we know, gives a bad name" (C). Such a statement obviously precludes the possibility that Plato accepted financial favors from Dionysius or acted as his banker, as the previous two letters claim. On the other hand, it is in agreement with Plato's actions as described in the Seventh Letter, and seems to make explicit the reasons for his insistence that he did not receive any money, reasons about which the Seventh Letter says nothing.<sup>27)</sup>

But though the frame of reference in both letters is the same, the Second does deviate from the Seventh in important details. To be sure, it too calls Plato "the most eminent of those engaged in philosophy" (311 E; cf. *Ep.* VII, 345 B), as is acknowledged by others. But it goes on to say that he came to Sicily "to gain [Dionysius'] testimony" to this standing, so that he "might get philosophy held in honor even by the multitude" (312 A). Of this, the Seventh Letter says nothing, despite the fact that its primary purpose is to explain why Plato went to Sicily.<sup>28)</sup> Also, Plato, as I have pointed out, is willing to leave it to Dionysius to choose between him and other philosophers. The Seventh Letter rejects with biting sarcasm the possibility that Dionysius could be a judge of the worth of Platonism (cf. especially 345 A-C).

The Second Epistle now turns to another problem which is raised in the Seventh Letter, namely, the nature of the First. Dionysius is reported to have said that he had no sufficient demonstration concerning it, and Plato proceeds to expound it to him "in a riddling fashion" so that, should "the tablet come to any harm 'in folds of ocean or of earth' he that readeth may not understand" (312 D). One cannot help being surprised by these introductory remarks. For the Seventh Letter never advocates writing in riddles.<sup>29)</sup>

<sup>27)</sup> Cf. above, p. 132.

<sup>28)</sup> I need hardly add that the assertion of the Second Letter could not be attributed to the Plato of the dialogues.

<sup>29)</sup> As I have tried to show, the Seventh Letter does not, properly speaking, teach an esoteric doctrine (above, p. 80). However, an Aristotelian fragment already accuses Plato of writing in riddles (above, p. 85).

Nor is the attitude taken in the philosophical digression identical with the Second Letter's request that Dionysius beware "lest these doctrines be ever divulged to uneducated people. For there are hardly any doctrines, I believe, which sound more absurd than these to the many (τοὺς πολλοὺς), or, on the other hand, more admirable and inspired to men of fine disposition" (314 A). The Seventh Letter considers writing down what one can say regarding the last truths to be unnecessary. For "the few" will find out by themselves. As to the rest, it is admitted that reading about the subject "would most unreasonably fill [some] with a mistaken contempt"; others, however, it would fill "with an overweening and empty aspiration, as though they had learnt something sublime" (341 E). <sup>30</sup>) The Seventh Letter is not as sweeping in its condemnation of the multitude.

Even if one were inclined to overlook these differences or to regard them as negligible—an author, after all, must not always say the same things or speak in exactly the same manner—one cannot take such an attitude toward what follows, namely, the answer to the question concerning the first principle. As Plato says, "the matter stands thus: Related to the King of All are all things, and for his sake they are, and of all things fair He is the cause. And related to the Second are the second things; and related to the Third the third. About these, then, the human soul strives to learn, looking to the things that are akin to itself, whereof none is fully perfect. But as to the King and the objects I have mentioned, they are of quite different quality. In the next place the soul inquires: 'Well then, what quality have they?' But the cause of all the mischief, O son of Dionysius and Doris, lies in this very question, or rather, in the travail which the question creates in the soul; and unless a man delivers himself from this he will never really attain the truth" (312 D-313 A).

It is not easy to be certain of the meaning of a statement put "in a riddling way." The First, the Second, and the Third have been variously identified with the Idea of the Good, Reason, and the Soul; or with God, the Ideas, and the World-Soul; or the Idea of the Good, the World as known by Science, and the World as known by Sense. Whichever of these identifications is the right one, it seems clear that the Second Letter distinguishes three realms

<sup>30</sup>) For the interpretation of these passages, see above, pp. 79 ff.

or grades of existence, while the Seventh Letter does not.<sup>31)</sup>

And furthermore, in the Second Letter the question concerning the nature of the First is answered in words, albeit in words of mystery. It is even capable of demonstration (312 D; cf. 313 B). This demonstration requires a long discourse (313 B), which may leave the hearer baffled so that his "view of the truth sways now this way, now that, round about the apparent object, whereas the true object is wholly different." In fact, the latter reaction is the usual one; hardly a single one of Plato's pupils has not suffered from this uncertainty or has escaped from it without "difficulty" (μόγισ, B-C). When the pupil is beset by doubt, he can put questions to the Master. Thus Dionysius is encouraged to send a messenger to Plato who will bring back to him Plato's answers as his "cargo" (313 D), the fairest "merchandise" of all (E). Finally, it is understood that the doctrine must be repeated and refined and tested, and "the most remarkable result of all" (314 A) is that it has taken quite a number of men of the finest qualities thirty years to find out that what at first they held to be "most incredible" is in reality "the most credible" (B).<sup>32)</sup> In the Seventh Letter, the knowledge of the Fifth, the Ideas, is beyond demonstration, beyond words or names; and there can be no philosophical trading of questions and answers between teacher and pupil. Such knowledge lies outside the realm of rational discourse and comes to men in a sudden vision within the soul, a vision that extinguishes all doubts and gives ever-lasting possession of the truth.<sup>33)</sup>

<sup>31)</sup> The various interpretations proposed are surveyed by Harward, p. 172. Bury (*Prefatory Note*, p. 401) rightly emphasizes that the Second Letter speaks of three realms of existence. That is the reason why one cannot, as do some critics, identify its trinity with the name, the definition and the Idea referred to in Epistle VII, 342 A ff.; for, not to mention the fact that these three are arbitrarily picked from the five given there, the basic distinction made is between two realms, that of Being, and that of quality. (The teaching of the Second Letter has, from early Christian times on, been compared with the Christian dogma [Novotny *ad* 323 D 2, p. 138].)

<sup>32)</sup> The assertion that it may take thirty years to be fully convinced of one's insight (cf. also 314 A) has been taken to indicate that Plato's teaching must go back to 393 B.C. (Bury *ad* 314 B). But it seems more probable that the statement merely echoes Plato's contention that the guardians have to study thirty years before they can attain to a knowledge of the Idea of the Good (*Republic*, VII, 537 B-540 A).

<sup>33)</sup> Cf. above, p. 105. Harward considers that the bent toward mysticism in 314 A 7-B 7 is not equalled even by the Seventh Letter (p. 174). But though the author may have in mind a sudden vision that comes to men after thirty years, he does not say so (even the word μόγισ [Ep. VII, 343 E] appears in

Other differences between the two letters perhaps concern less important issues, but they are still quite significant. According to the Second Letter, when Plato gave Dionysius an exposé of his teaching "in the garden", Dionysius responded "that [he himself] had formed this notion and that it was a discovery of [his] own" (313 A), a disclosure that was quite astonishing to Plato and not very convincing (B). According to the Seventh Letter, Dionysius—though Plato did not expound the matter fully during the test—declared "that he knew many of the most important doctrines and was sufficiently informed owing to the version he had heard from his other teachers" (341 B; cf. 338 D).<sup>34</sup> Again, both letters deal with the meaning of Plato's literary work. As the Second Letter has it, "no treatise by Plato exists or will exist, but those which now bear his name belong to a Socrates become fair and new" (314 B). The Plato of the Seventh Letter claims that his writings do not contain his truly serious thoughts. Yet he does not give credit for them to another, or consider them, as it were, a new and more elegant edition of Socrates' unwritten conversations.<sup>35</sup>

In the recent debate, the genuineness of the Second Letter has been strongly defended. In order to appreciate the document rightly, one has said, it is necessary to note its sarcastic and bitter tone. One has pointed out the importance of its trinitarian metaphysics, which provided the inspiration for Neoplatonists and the early Fathers of the Church.<sup>36</sup> Granted that the latter is true, it does not yet prove that Plato is the author of the letter. And certainly, if he were, he could not at the same time be the author of the Seventh Letter. The two epistles are worlds apart.<sup>37</sup>

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another context [313 C]), and, as I have pointed out, he is intent on proving and discussing the truth.

<sup>34</sup>) Only afterwards did Plato hear that Dionysius later composed a book "as though it were something of his invention and quite different from what he had heard" (341 B; cf. 345 B εὐρηκέναι ἢ μεμαθηκέναι).

<sup>35</sup>) For the translation "a Socrates become fair and new," see *A.J.P.*, 83, 1962, p. 2, note 3, and for the divergence of the Second Letter from the Seventh in its judgment on Plato's writings, *op. cit.*, p. 3. The expression "a new and more elegant edition" I have borrowed from the epitaph B. Franklin wrote for himself. Oscar Wilde once said, "The soul is old when it enters the body; the body must grow old so that the soul may become young. Plato—Plato is the youth of Socrates" (André Gide in *In Memoriam Oscar Wilde*). The author of the letter, I am afraid, was not one to appreciate so beautiful and deeply felt an interpretation.

<sup>36</sup>) Friedländer, I<sup>2</sup>, pp. 254-59.

<sup>37</sup>) The Second Letter, like the Sixth, has religious overtones which recall



The *Third Letter*, the last of the letters to Dionysius, is perhaps the broadest in scope. Plato has heard that Dionysius accuses him of having thwarted his intention "to re-occupy the Greek cities in Italy" and to change his tyranny into a monarchy, and of counselling Dion, now that he is fighting against Dionysius, to do exactly the same (315 D). The letter is meant on principle to refute this charge and at the same time, a long standing accusation made by others that Plato is largely responsible for Dionysius' political decisions (E-316 A). But in the course of the argument many other questions are taken up and not a little is told about Plato's plans and his reasons for going to Sicily.

In the letter itself, Dionysius' complaints and the statement of Plato's case in the matter are treated secondly (319 A-E), but since this section is much shorter than the preceding discussion of the earlier calumnies, it may be convenient to deal with it first. Plato denounces Dionysius' charge as contrary to fact. In a conversation, which they had during Plato's third stay in Sicily and which was witnessed by others, Dionysius himself reminded Plato that when he first arrived at his court, he counselled him "to plant settlers in the Greek cities" (319 B). The conversation is said to have taken place "in the garden", "some twenty days" before Plato left for home, and to have started with Dionysius' complaint that Plato "cared more for Heraclides and for all the rest" than for the tyrant (319 A). Now it is of course true that according to the Seventh Epistle Plato advised Dionysius to resettle the Greek colonies. But the tyrant's complaint about Plato's preferring others to him is brought by a messenger to Plato, who was then living in the home of Archedemus (349 D-E).<sup>38</sup> And it is expressly stated that after Plato had taken the side of the military leaders—the

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the metaphysics of Xenocrates, who spoke of the highest principle as Father and Zeus (Zeller, II, 1<sup>4</sup>, p. 1014). Xenocrates is famous also for the triadic scheme of interpretation pervading his epistemology, and metaphysics and physics alike (concerning the triad of his metaphysical theology, see Heinze, *Xenocrates*, 1892, pp. 75 ff.). It would seem most likely, therefore, that the Second Letter interprets Plato in the spirit of Xenocrates. That it was composed by Dionysius, or is a letter of Plato's with interpolations by Dionysius (Field, p. 201) seems to me improbable.

<sup>38</sup> See Harward, p. 178. The two letters also differ in what they tell about Heraclides. According to the Seventh Letter, he takes flight (349 C), while according to the Third Letter, he is driven out by Dionysius. And in the Third, Plato is supposed to have openly embraced Dion's cause (above, note 18).

event which prompted Dionysius' complaint (cf. also III, 318 C)—he was no longer summoned to the court (E). Moreover, this banishment from the presence of the sovereign must have occurred earlier than twenty days before Plato's departure. For it was only after a number of other incidents following Plato's espousal of the cause of the military leaders that he made plans for leaving, plans that included enlisting Archytas' help by letter (350 A-B). According to the time schedule of the Seventh Letter, then, he could hardly have seen Dionysius in the garden at the time at which he met him according to the Third Letter.<sup>39)</sup>

Strangely enough, nothing is said in this refutation of Dionysius' accusation about his charge that Plato made it impossible for him to transform the tyranny into a monarchy, though in the final summary Dionysius is warned against slandering Plato "by declaring that I was hindering you from colonizing the Greek cities. . . from relieving the Syracusans by substituting a monarchy for a tyranny" (319 C-D). Or, to be more exact, it is maintained merely that both plans were Plato's and that Dionysius failed to execute them, and it is added that Plato could—"if any competent tribunal were anywhere to be seen"—produce clearer evidence (D). The Seventh Letter, I need hardly mention, never advises Dionysius to establish a monarchical rule in his territory.<sup>40)</sup> On the other hand, in the course of the conversation on which the Third Letter reports, a new point is raised. As Dionysius says to Plato. "You bade me be educated before I did all these things or else not do them." And when Plato admits this, the tyrant continues: "Did you mean educated in geometry or what?" (319 B-C). Plato does not answer the question. The tyrant was in a bad temper and he did not wish to irritate him even more out of fear that he might not be able to leave (C). Here, then, it is assumed that from the very beginning Plato urged Dionysius to devote himself to the studies preliminary to the training of the philosopher. It is the traditional account of what happened, but the one rejected by the Seventh Epistle.<sup>41)</sup>

<sup>39)</sup> The Seventh Letter gives but one specific date (below, note 42). In this instance one can only try to give a reasonable estimate of the length of time which these events would have required.

<sup>40)</sup> Instead, rule through *Hetairiae* is advocated (above, p. 29). Monarchical government is, however, mentioned in the Eighth Letter (below, pp. 147 f.).

<sup>41)</sup> Cf. above, p. 23. Obviously, the garden as a setting for conversations has its opportunity for the writers of the letters, and even the details of the

To turn to the refutation of the first charges made by Dionysius, the letter begins with an account of what happened when Plato came to Sicily on the invitation of Dionysius and Dion. The latter was soon "cast out" (316 D). Plato, having lost his trusted friend, and unacquainted with Dionysius, had no other choice than "to bid farewell for the future to politics" (*ibid.*). He could only work for a reconciliation between Dionysius and Dion and hope, once Dionysius had gone to war and he himself had finally left, that the tyrant would invite both Dion and himself back, as was then agreed upon (E-317 A). All this is almost identical with what is told in the Seventh Letter. There, Dion, for as long as he was still in Sicily, and Plato gave advice to Dionysius (322 A-B; cf. 332 C ff.). Although what happened after Dion's banishment is not explicitly stated, there is no indication that, when left alone, Plato suggested any action to Dionysius or had any influence upon him. Also, the conditions under which Plato left are also the same, except that it is nowhere implied that he had difficulties in getting Dionysius' permission to go home (338 A).<sup>42</sup>

The matter stands differently with regard to the events that took place before Plato's third trip and during the visit itself (317 E-319 C), as a careful comparison will show. The Third Letter states, as does the Seventh, that Dionysius, contrary to the agreement made, invited only Plato and postponed Dion's coming. Both letters speak of Dion's urging Plato to accept the invitation and of Plato's procrastination under the pretext that he was too old (compare 317 A-C with 338 B-C). But according to the Third Letter, Plato, who did not trust Dionysius and expected him again to give credence to Plato's calumniators, was angry at Dion because

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interview described in the Third Letter resemble closely those of the interview described in the Seventh Letter, despite the basically different content of the conversation. In the former document, the tyrant speaks "in a most indignant and most mocking tone" and "with a very artificial laugh" (319 B-C); in the latter, Dionysius "fired up and went all colors, just as an angry man would do" (349 A) and looked at Plato "with a highly tyrannical glare" while talking to him (B).

<sup>42</sup> Cf. above, pp. 22 f. The one event dated exactly in the Seventh Letter is Dion's fall into disgrace (after three months, 329 C). It is reasonable to conjecture that by this the letter wishes to indicate how little time Plato had for exercising any influence on Dionysius. The Third Letter deviates slightly from the Seventh in saying that Dion's expulsion was due to some man or god or chance aided by Dionysius (316 D), while in the autobiography the decision is the tyrant's (329 C). The charge that Plato was made responsible for all of Dionysius' faults (315 E), is reminiscent of Ep. I, 309 A.

he wanted him to make the trip. According to the Seventh Letter, Plato did not take it amiss that Dion urged him to go to Sicily. He was doubtful that Dionysius had made such progress in philosophy as was reported by friends, and roused the anger of both Dion and Dionysius by his dilatory answer.<sup>43</sup>) And while in the Third Letter Plato makes up his own mind, "resolving that none of my friends should lay it to my charge that owing to my lack of energy all their fortunes were ruined when they might have been saved from ruin" (317 D), in the Seventh Letter the intervention of Archytas (338 C) and Dionysius' cunning devise of sending a trireme "in order to secure my comfort" (339 A) are instrumental in convincing Plato to undertake the voyage, in the interests of his friends, to be sure, but most of all in the service of philosophy (E).

Having arrived in Sicily, the Plato of the Third Letter requested Dion's return, but failed to persuade Dionysius to recall him (317 E). Next Plato insisted that the family retain possession of Dion's money, and that he himself be paid his yearly revenue. This, too, was not granted (318 A). Then, Dionysius declared he would sell Dion's property—but only with Dion's consent—and send one half to Corinth and keep the other half for his son. The promise, like many others, was broken (B). Finally, Dionysius did dispose of Dion's property, kept Plato in ignorance of what he had done, and by accusing him of preferring Dion and Dion's friends, made it impossible for Plato even to ask for the dispatch of the money. Thus, their political estrangement was brought about. It was only right and proper for Plato not to betray his "old and intimate friend" (D), despite the allurements Dionysius offered—"for filthy lucre's sake, obviously; for to this, and nothing else, men would have ascribed this change of front in me if I had changed" (E). It was Dionysius' fault that "this wolf-love and want of fellowship" between the two came to exist.

In the Seventh Letter, the sequence of events is by no means the same, and Plato's behavior is less faultless, while that of Dionysius is better understandable. The tyrant for some time did allow the trustees of Dion's estate to remit the income to Dion, as he had promised on his own account, it would seem, in his letter inviting Plato (345 C; compare 339 C). He then claimed that Dion's proper-

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<sup>43</sup>) Cf. above, p. 40.

ty belonged not to Dion, but to Dion's son, and no longer allowed payments to be made to Dion (345 D). Plato, angered by Dionysius' action, wished to leave. When the tyrant realized that Plato was in earnest and could not be persuaded to remain, he suggested that Dion remove his property to the Peloponnesus, "on condition that he does not conspire against me" (346 B) and that Plato and the other friends of Dion in Sicily "be the guarantors of these terms" (*ibid.*). If they were fulfilled, Plato was to take Dion's funds to him within one year (C). Plato, after much deliberation, agreed to the proposal (346 D-347 B), but asked Dionysius to write, together with him, a letter to Dion and leave the decision to him (C). This was agreed upon by both Dionysius and Plato, yet when the sailing season was over, Dionysius again claimed that half of Dion's property belonged to his son; he would therefore sell it and give half of it to Plato to convey it to Dion; this would be most equitable (D). Plato was dumbfounded, but thought it utterly ridiculous to oppose the tyrant any longer, though he urged him to wait for Dion's answer. When Dionysius did not listen and immediately sold the property, Plato ceased talking to him about the subject for there seemed to be no profit in so doing (E). To be sure, he suspected that Dionysius was scheming "how he might shoo me back without paying away any of Dion's money" (348 A). Moreover, in Plato's opinion it was Dionysius' "previous plot of refusing to pay over Dion's money" (349 A) that made him quarrel with Plato and accuse him "of always preferring Dion and Dion's friends to him" (E). But no bribes are offered to Plato, and they do not part "in wolf-love and in want of fellowship." <sup>44</sup>) Plato still considers himself the tyrant's guest-friend, and he keeps out of Dion's war because he has "ties in common with you both, in case you should ever come to crave at all for mutual friendship and wish to do one another good" (350 D). To put it differently, he remains ready to bring about a reconciliation between the hostile parties. <sup>45</sup>)

<sup>44</sup>) I should mention, however, that in the Seventh Letter Dionysius tries to gain Plato's acquiescence in Dion's expulsion "by means of honors and gifts of money" on the occasion of his second trip (333 D; see also 329 D). The Third Letter seems to transpose the incident to the third trip and to the negotiations about Dion's money.

<sup>45</sup>) Cf. above, p. 44. This is perhaps also the reason why Plato, when leaving Sicily, "neither asked for any of [Dion's] money nor did anyone pay me any" (350 B). Apparently, he felt that in view of Dionysius' suspicion and in view of Dion's preparations for war, which are mentioned immediately in the text (350 C), he could not go on insisting that Dion's property be restored.

Obviously, then, the two letters tell the same story from entirely different points of view. The Third Letter makes Dionysius responsible for the break between him and Plato and shows that Plato was hated by the tyrant since he did not wish to betray his friend, Dion. The Seventh Letter—though it lays the blame on Dionysius for Plato's lack of success in teaching him philosophy, for Dionysius' failure to become a Platonist—at least admits that Dionysius was afraid of Dion's misusing his money to fight against him. It even allows that Dionysius "probably believed that [Plato], as many slanderers asserted, was conspiring with [Dion] against himself and his throne" (350 C). So contradictory are the "data" presented in the two documents that one cannot use the Third Letter to fill gaps in the account in the autobiography.<sup>46)</sup>

In sum, none of the four letters addressed to Dionysius can be the work of the author of the *apologia pro vita sua*. Does this mean that they are entirely independent of it? Although the Third Letter deviates from the Seventh, it is surely influenced by it too. The author is familiar with Plato's advice to resettle the colonies. He copies other details, using almost the same phrasing. The Second Letter shares with the Seventh at least the framework within which Plato's personal relations with Dionysius are described; it at least grants that Plato's teaching concerns the Nature of the First, although it changes the content of the doctrine and envisages a different approach to knowledge. Both the letters, then, seem to presuppose the Seventh Letter and can hardly have been composed without a knowledge of it.<sup>47)</sup> As for the First and Thirteenth Letters, they show that Plato is not above using, or misusing, his connection with the Sicilian court to his own advantage, and thus are in

<sup>46)</sup> As is done by Harward who, despite his acknowledgment that the letters differ in essential points, considers both of them to be genuine (pp. 175 ff.). Friedländer seems to be undecided about the genuineness of the document (I<sup>2</sup>, p. 258). I should mention that the Second Letter does not specify the content of Plato's philosophy (as it does not mention Plato's disappointment after testing Dionysius). What is said about the dead (311 C) differs from Epistle VII, 335 A (cf., however, *Apology*, 40 C; *Menexenus*, 248 C).

<sup>47)</sup> The borrowings of the Third Letter from the Seventh are acknowledged by Bury (*Prefatory Note*, p. 423). Wilamowitz believes that Epistles II, III, and IV are composed on the basis of the Seventh and Eighth Letters (*Platon*, p. 510, note 1). There may indeed be an influence of the Eighth Letter in so far as it deals with the plan to set up a kingdom instead of a tyranny (cf. below, p. 147). But this influence concerns one detail; the main source for the Second and Third Letters must be the Seventh Letter.

flagrant conflict with the Third and Seventh Letters. They could nevertheless have taken their subject from the autobiography, only in order to treat it in a very different manner.<sup>48)</sup> If that were true, one would be able to say that the version of Plato's life and thought which the Seventh Letter presents, and which is unique, occupies a central position in the collection of Platonic letters not only because it gives the most elaborate account, but also because it prompted others to write Platonic epistles. And if the Seventh Letter really played such a role, this would throw some light on the origin of the letters addressed to Dion and others as well as those addressed to Dionysius.

#### 4. THE SECOND LETTER TO DION AND HIS FOLLOWERS

I have left to the end the letter closest to the Seventh Epistle, namely, the *Eighth*, which is also addressed to Dion's followers. Unlike the *apologia*, it is free from all personal reminiscences; it proffers advice (352 B) in a straightforward manner without digressing into any other subjects. But the advice given is said to be "the advice given of old" (παλαιῶν ἐμὴν συμβουλήν, 354 A). It is also asserted that what Plato recommends is "what Dion too would have said to you now were he alive and able to speak" (355 A; cf. 357 A). Thus the Plato of the Seventh Letter identifies himself with his dead friend and claims to speak in his name (336 E). If any of the letters creates the impression that it is written by the author of the autobiography, it certainly is the Eighth. And when one first reads it, one can indeed not fail to be reminded of what has been said in the Seventh Epistle.

For Plato prefaces his advice by a statement regarding what the *hoi polloi* consider good advice to warring factions. In their opinion, counsel ought to result in as much advantage as possible for oneself and as much harm as possible to one's enemies. Plato rejects such an attitude and pleads for a policy "beneficial to all

<sup>48)</sup> Wilamowitz attributes the Thirteenth Letter to an adherent of Dionysius who wishes to damage Plato's reputation (*Platon*, pp. 510 f.). One might be inclined to accept this hypothesis were the letter not preserved in the collection of Platonic letters. This fact seems to speak in favor of the assumption that, no matter how strange the attitude attributed to Plato in the Thirteenth Letter may seem to modern readers, in the opinion of the ancients the picture of him given here is not a hostile one, but a portrayal of him as a family man, as it were (below, note 75).

alike, foes as well as friends, or at least as little detrimental as possible to either" (352 E). Just so, the Plato of the Seventh Letter is opposed to bloodshed; he and his friend Dion aim at "the establishment of the justest and best of laws by means of the fewest possible exiles and executions" (351 C; cf. 336 E).<sup>49)</sup>

This policy "beneficial to all alike, foes as well as friends", in the case at hand, must apply to the relation between Dion's followers and Dionysius. While Dionysius' father saved his country from ruin and thereby earned the gratitude of its citizens, his ancestors abused the tyrannic power (353 A-B). They have paid the penalty at least in part through the expulsion of the younger Dionysius from Italy (C).<sup>50)</sup> To be sure, they ought to be punished still more. But the question arises as to how much more of a penalty can be exacted "under the existing circumstances" (ἐκ τῶν ὑπαρχόντων, *ibid.*). After all, Dionysius is still powerful. As past events have shown, no side can achieve complete success. If the war is continued, one risks the danger that tyrants and democrats alike will be annihilated. It is on these grounds that Plato has the courage to speak out and hopes for acceptance of his advice (353 C-D). He also predicts that unless his counsel is accepted, "hardly a trace of the Greek tongue will remain in all Sicily since it will have been transformed into a province or dependency of Phoenicians or Opicians" (353 E).

Now one may well consider it a legitimate elaboration of the Seventh Letter's philhellenism, and also of its tendency to prophesy future events, that the Eighth Letter refers to the dangers with which alien tribes threaten Sicily. Later on, it even asks, as does the Seventh Epistle, that the barbarians be expelled from Sicily and the Greek cities be colonized (357 A). One must add, though, that if the Opicians said to be threatening Sicily were the Romans, Plato would have possessed an almost superhuman gift of prophecy in predicting what was going to happen almost a hundred years after his death.<sup>51)</sup> Also it is surely somewhat surprising that Plato

<sup>49)</sup> Cf. above, p. 25.

<sup>50)</sup> This seems to be the meaning of the sentence. The letter does not say in what the penalty consisted (see Bury and Bluck, *ad loc.*). Concerning the inaccuracies in the account of Sicily's history, see below, note 70.

<sup>51)</sup> Harward (*ad loc.*) says: "The passage shows that . . . Plato could make a sound forecast of the future." Eggermann calls the prophecy a unique testimony to Plato's insight into practical politics (p. 31, note 1). Even if the Opicians were a tribe of central Italy, the Samnites or Campanians (Bury, *ad loc.*), Plato's foresight would be astonishing. As Novotny (*ad loc.*) notes,



should be so much of a pragmatist, both in using his foresight in order to win his point and in appealing to the persuasive power of the existing circumstances when he talks of Dionysius. It is true, in the Seventh Letter, too, he is satisfied with advising "the second best" (337 D). But when he does point out the consequences of a refusal to listen to his advice, these consequences are moral rather than practical (334 D-E).<sup>52</sup>)

As realistic as the preamble is the advice which follows it. Plato speaks as an arbitrator and addresses himself to both parties, to Dionysius as well as to the followers of Dion (354 A). Despotism ought to be changed into kingship. The example of Lycurgus has shown that this is possible (δυνατὸν δὲ ὡς ἔδειξεν ἔργῳ, 354 B). The Spartans have also proved that such a change is useful, for on account of it "they have already been kept safe (σώζεσθαι) all these generations" (B-C). Those "rushing after despotic power" should, therefore, alter their course (C). Those following "after the ways of freedom" (D) should beware of the fact that immoderate freedom leads to license, as it happened in the earlier days of Sicily. For it was hence that "the rule of the despots befell them. For, as regards both slavery and freedom, when either is in excess it is wholly evil (παγκακόν), but when in moderation wholly good" (παναγαθόν, E). It is because "things are naturally ordained thus" (355 A) that Plato is to give his more concrete advice "concerning the present situation" (*ibid.*).

But before one can turn to these stipulations themselves, it is necessary to scrutinize more closely what has just been stated. For the advice addressed to the two parties is called "the counsel I gave of old" (354 A). If that is so, the advice of the Eighth Letter ought to be in agreement with that of the Seventh, and in some manner, this is the case. The short description of Lycurgus' achievement stresses the fact that through him "law became . . . supreme king over men instead of men being despots over the laws" (354 C). The admonition directed toward the lovers of freedom ends with the assertion: "Moderate slavery consists in being the slave of

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Campanians were in possession of some Sicilian cities when Timoleon came to Sicily (Diod. 16, 67; cf. below, note 70).

<sup>52</sup>) Having asked the followers of Dion to be persuaded for the sake of Zeus, Plato bids them to consider "also the case of Dionysius and of Dion, of whom the former was unpersuaded and is living now no noble life, while the latter was persuaded and has nobly died." Then he goes on to discuss the doctrine of immortality (334 E-335 C).

God, immoderate, in being the slave of men; and men of sound sense have Law for their God, but men without sense Pleasure" (354 E-355 A). Thus the Seventh Letter proclaims: "Neither Sicily, nor yet any other State—such is my doctrine—should be enslaved to human despots (δεσπόταις) but rather to laws, for such slavery is good neither for those who enslave, nor those who are enslaved themselves, their children and their children's children" (334 C). This is the advice Plato gave first to Dion, then to Dionysius, "and now in the third place" to the followers of Dion (D), and it is also the doctrine of the dialogues, where Lycurgus is sometimes quoted as the prototype of the good lawgiver (e.g. *Republic*, X, 599 D). <sup>53)</sup>

But where in the Seventh Letter does Plato advise Dionysius to transform his tyranny into a kingdom? To be sure, it is once said in passing that Dion wanted to make Dionysius "a king worthy of the throne" (βασιλέα ἀρχῆς ἄξιον, 333 B). This, at least, is the literal translation of the words used; they might equally well be taken to mean that Dion wanted Dionysius to become "a ruler worthy of his realm". <sup>54)</sup> At any rate, the counsel which according to the Seventh Letter Plato and Dion "always" gave Dionysius was that he should surround himself with "friends" (332 C-D). They never advised him to become a constitutional monarch. Only in the Third Letter is Plato reported to have counselled Dionysius to substitute a monarchy for a tyranny (319 D; cf. 316 D) and to have given the same counsel to Dion when he had begun his war against Dionysius (316 D). It is, I think, fair to claim that no one would pay much attention to the Seventh Letter's isolated remark on "kingship" were he not confronted with the explicit statement of the Eighth and the remarks in the Third. <sup>55)</sup>

<sup>53)</sup> Other passages on Lycurgus are collected by Shorey, *ad loc.* What the Eighth Letter says about Lycurgus does not exactly agree with the judgment rendered on him in the *Laus* (III, 691 E ff.; also I, 630 D; IX, 858 E), the dialogue which more than any other emphasizes the supremacy of law. But it is possible that the epistle "is simply following the time-honored Greek tradition that looked upon Lycurgus as the author of the entire Spartan constitution" (Morrow, p. 87), though one must not forget that Dicaearchus, the Peripatetic historian and philosopher, accused Plato of having combined the doctrines of Socrates and Lycurgus (cf. Jaeger, *S.B. Berl.*, 1928, pp. 419 ff. and above, I, note 155).

<sup>54)</sup> Thus Howald, and compare such passages as *Republic*, V, 473 C-D; VI, 499 B. Harward translates "a sovereign worthy of supreme power." Bury and Bluck render the term in question as king.

<sup>55)</sup> Egermann, whose merit it is to have drawn attention to the passage in the Seventh Letter, concludes from it that it had always been Plato's

Moreover, the spirit of "Realpolitik," in which the adoption of kingship is proposed and defended, is, as I have indicated already, hardly compatible with the spirit of the Seventh Letter or the spirit of Platonism. The attitude taken by the author of the Eighth Letter reminds one, rather, of the famous chapter in Aristotle's *Politics*, in which Plato's greatest friend and rival tries to convince the tyrant that one way—and the better and safer way—of preserving his power is "to act cleverly the royal part" (δοκεῖν ὑποκρινόμενον τὸ βασιλικὸν καλῶς [V, 1314 a 39 f.]; cf. βασιλικὸν εἶναι φαίνεσθαι τοῖς ἀρχομένοις [1315 b 1 f.]). This conciliatory method implies that the tyrant become "a guardian and steward as it were of a public fund and not a private estate" (1314 b 17 f.; cf. 1315 b 2 f.). Thus the Eighth Letter asks the despots "to try to transform themselves into the form of a king (εἰς βασιλέως εἶδος) and to become subject to kingly laws (νόμοις βασιλικοῖς), owing their possession of the highest honors to the voluntary good will of the citizens and to the laws" (354 C).<sup>56</sup> And if Aristotle derives the rise of tyranny from "the final form of unrestricted democracy (1313 b 32 ff.), the Eighth Letter derives it from "unmeasured love of freedom" (354 D). In short, it looks as if the author of the letter had been familiar with Aristotle's *Politics*. Certainly he cannot have believed that these measures, accepted for the sake of their usefulness, could result in anything more than what Aristotle expects from them, namely, that the tyrant's rule "will endure longer, and moreover that he himself in his personal character will be nobly disposed toward virtue, or at all events half-virtuous and not base but only half-base" (1315 b 8-10). He cannot have thought of the true conversion to morality that is aimed at in the dialogues as well as in the Seventh Letter.<sup>57</sup>

intention to educate Dionysius to be king (*Die Platonischen Briefe VII und VIII*, 1928, p. 31). And he considers the words παλαιὰν ἐμὴν συμβουλὴν as a direct reference to Epistle VII, 334 C-337 E, that is, to all the advice given there (19 f.). But the words in question say expressly what the "old advice" was, namely, "to shun the despot's title and his task, and change his despotism for kingship" (354 A). It is, therefore, hardly correct to say that the advice of the Eighth Letter is actually and expressly based on that of the Seventh (p. 20). Also Harward seems to me to be right in saying that nothing in the Seventh Letter could be described as παλαιὰ συμβουλή (*ad* 354 A 5).

<sup>56</sup> Bury translates εἰς βασιλέως εἶδος as "into the semblance of a king." (I have followed Howald's "Form einer Königswürde"). This would make the similarity with the Aristotle passages quoted even closer.

<sup>57</sup> The parallel between the Eighth Letter and Aristotle's *Politics* has been noted briefly by Newman (*ad* 1313 a 34), who has also pointed out that

Thus far, the Plato of the Eighth Letter has been talking in his own name. Turning now to concrete advice "concerning the present situation," he begins to speak in the name of Dion (355 A) and continues to do so until the end (357 D). The content of the laws to be enacted is set down first. They are to be such "as do not appear to you likely to turn your minds covetously to money making and wealth but rather—since there are three objects, the soul, the body, and money besides—. . . such laws as cause the virtue of the soul to be held first in honor, that of the body second, subordinate to that of the soul, and the honor paid to money to come third and last in subjection to both body and soul" (355 A-B).

The scale of values here established is Platonic indeed (cf. e.g. *Gorgias*, 477 C; *Laws* III, 697 B; V, 726 A ff.). It is no less Platonic that the task of the laws is conceived as that of educating the citizens, of making them better men. However, the truth of the exhortation, the letter adds, will become apparent to the addressees "by actual experience, if you make trial of what I am now saying concerning laws; for in all matters experience is held to be the truest test" (C). This may be consistent with the pragmatic attitude the author has taken before, but it is hardly reconcilable with the doctrine of the dialogues.<sup>58</sup>) Finally, if one compares what the Eighth Letter says with the principles laid down in the Seventh concerning

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similar attempts "to lead the tyrant into a better path" are made by Xenophon (*Hiero*, 9-11) and Isocrates (*Ad Nicoclem* and *Helena* [32 ff.]). The subject was so to say fashionable at that time. If I am not mistaken, the commentators on the letter fail to emphasize or to explain the pragmatic outlook it attributes to Plato. I should note that Plato, too, explains the rise of tyranny through the decay of democracy (*Republic*, VIII, 565 C ff.). (In quoting Aristotle in the text, I have simply wished to indicate the full agreement between his theory and the one embraced in the letter.) It goes without saying that Plato never recommends the "conciliatory method" of Aristotle who "anticipates the character of Machiavelli, and gives 'politic' advice to a 'new prince' in a realistic way" (though this advice "is fundamentally different from that of Machiavelli," for Aristotle "bids the new prince abjure 'reasons of State' and play the king—and the man" [Barker, *The Politics of Aristotle*, 1946, p. 247, note 1]). I should at least mention that Aristotle tends to think of himself as an arbiter in matters of philosophy, just as Plato appears here as arbiter (354 A) for the contending political parties.

<sup>58</sup>) Passages such as *Republic*, III, 408 E ff., V, 452 D ff., adduced by Bury (*ad loc.*), afford no parallels to the verdict of the letter. Nor does VI, 487 C prove that Plato ever acknowledged the supremacy of experience over thought (see Shorey, *ad loc.* and the material quoted by him). The Seventh Letter, though to be sure more empirical than the dialogues, does not go as far as the Eighth Letter either.

the formulation of laws, one becomes aware of the fact that the Plato speaking through the mouth of Dion is not quite the Plato speaking for himself. For in the autobiography, he holds that the laws to be enacted should in the first place be "impartial laws" (νόμους κοινούς, 337 A); otherwise, there will be no end to strife and hatred (A-B). In the second place, they must secure "equal rights in common to the whole city" (C). They must, that is, be democratic.<sup>59)</sup>

The second stipulation laid down in the name of Dion concerns the forms of the constitution. A "middle course" (μέσον τεμνῖν) is advised (355 D). The Syracusans are to install three kings, who are to be Dion's son, the son of Dionysius, and Dionysius himself (355 E-356 B). Thus "let the one party of you gain freedom by the aid of kingly rule, and the other gain a form of kingly rule that is not irresponsible, with the laws exercising despotic sway over the kings themselves as well as the rest of the citizens, in case they do anything illegal" (D-C). It goes without saying that the concept of a middle-road government is alien to the autobiography.<sup>60)</sup>

The rest of Dion's advice is concerned with the actual setting up of the constitution and with the filling in of details (356 A-357 A). The power of the three kings is to be determined by "envoys empowered to negotiate a pact, such men, as they may choose, whether they come from Sicily or from abroad or both, and in such numbers as may be mutually agreed upon" (C). This point is introduced as one "which indeed has been described to you before" (B-C), and it is re-iterated that "as was said before, envoys empowered to negotiate a pact" should be convoked (C). One naturally takes these remarks to be references to the Seventh Letter. But there, the victors are asked to choose lawgivers "from amongst them-

<sup>59)</sup> Cf. above, pp. 12 f. One might conceivably argue that it was unnecessary to repeat the stipulation that the laws be impartial since the Eighth Letter aims at the reconciliation of foe and friend. But the omission of any reference to the democratic character of the laws constitutes, to be sure, a difference in outlook.

<sup>60)</sup> This contention would be untenable if Bury and Bluck were right in translating the word πολιτεία (351 C) as "moderate government." But the term in question surely designates any constitution, or, if it has any specific meaning at all, "democratic constitution." Howald's rendering "wirkliche Verfassung" seems to me most appropriate. The Seventh Letter expressly speaks of the need for "a just government with equal laws" (326 D). It is hardly necessary to add that Aristotle is the champion of the middle road in all political and moral problems (cf. above, note 57).

selves" (337 B) and it is added that they should be "such men of Greek origin as are known by inquiry to be most excellent" (*ibid.*). A proviso that people should be called from Sicily itself and from other parts of Greece is mentioned only in connection with the resettlement of Sicily (336 D).<sup>61)</sup> The final regulations are concerned with the duties of the kings and the selection of judges. They have no counterpart in the Seventh Letter—such details may indeed have been outside its scope—but they are more or less in agreement with the rules Plato incorporates into his great constitutional treatise, the *Laws*.<sup>62)</sup>

From my comparison of the two letters, their sharp disagreement should have become clear. Indeed, it has hardly ever been denied that the Eighth and the Seventh Letters differ in their general advice no less than in regard to many minor matters. The question has always been how great the difference between the two is, and whether they could nevertheless have been written by the same author. Some critics have maintained that the Eighth Letter duplicates the Seventh and is the work of a forger. Others have explained the fact that the letters exist side by side by saying that they are addressed to different audiences, the Seventh meant in reality for all Greeks, while the Eighth was actually sent to Dion's followers.<sup>63)</sup>

More recently, an attempt has been made to show that the letters were written on different occasions, that quite some time must have elapsed between the composition of the Seventh and the Eighth Epistles, and that the two could be thought of as the work of the same writer because they address themselves to entirely different circumstances and have entirely different purposes. It is a hypothesis that has found much favor.<sup>64)</sup>

<sup>61)</sup> The change may not be very important, but it does show that one cannot simply take 356 B-C to refer back to the Seventh Letter (contrary to Bury, *ad loc.*). Nor has Eggermann's elaborate discussion of the words in question and of 356 C (pp. 20 ff.) removed the difficulty which is posed by the discrepancy I have pointed out. Cf. also Harward, *ad* 356 C and below, note 67.

<sup>62)</sup> Compare the parallels quoted in the commentaries. I should add, however, that the Eighth Letter treats all questions of politics without any regard to metaphysical problems, which is not true of the *Laws* or of the Seventh Letter.

<sup>63)</sup> Thus Wilamowitz (*Platon*, II, pp. 302-04). Adam (*Arch. f. Gesch. d. Philos.*, 1909, pp. 32 f.) considers the Eighth Letter to be spurious.

<sup>64)</sup> The theory proposed is that of Eggermann (*Die platonischen Briefe VII und VIII, passim*). Howald, who once thought that Epistle VII was never dispatched (*Die Briefe Platons*, 1923, pp. 28 ff.; the older literature on the

Now it could well be that the Seventh Letter was written, or ostensibly written, under the impress of Dion's death in 354, while the Eighth Letter presupposes the expulsion of Callippus in 353/52, for in the latter, it seems that Callippus is no longer regarded as an enemy who has any power to interfere with the decisions to be made. But I see no possibility of deciding whether the Seventh Letter was sent immediately after the assassination of Dion and the Eighth immediately after the downfall of Callippus. How much time was needed to compose the Seventh Letter one cannot know, and it is also unknown when Dionysius resumed his war against Syracuse as he evidently did according to the Eighth Letter.<sup>65)</sup> It is true—and this had been overlooked in the earlier discussion—that the two letters take account of two different historical situations. In the Seventh, Callippus is the dangerous opponent of Dion's followers, whereas in the Eighth the opponent is again Dionysius. But can such a difference in historical circumstances account for the different advice given? As I have tried to show, the deviations of the Eighth Letter from the Seventh and from the dialogues are greater than is usually assumed. Some of the opinions proposed have a distinctly Aristotelian flavor. In short, if it is difficult to believe that the author of the letter is Plato, it is no less difficult to believe that he is the same who wrote the autobiography. The differences between the two documents in particulars are so great that one cannot attribute them to altered circumstances. The two plans—whether conceived within thirteen months or within two or three years—would be evidence of an inexplicable change of heart.<sup>66)</sup>

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problem is summarized on p. xi), later changed his mind and included Epistles VII and VIII in his *Die echten Briefe Platons* (see his argument, pp. 36 ff.).

<sup>65)</sup> Cf. Hell (*Hermes*, 1932, pp. 295 ff., especially 302 [see above, I, note 17]), who in my opinion has successfully refuted Egermann's "absolute chronology" (p. 295).

<sup>66)</sup> I say this because no matter how different the circumstances, one would expect the two plans suggested for the solution of the political crisis to agree at least on principle. Surely Plato would not change his entire point of view simply because the circumstances had changed even if he were as much of a pragmatist as the Eighth Letter makes him out to be (contrary to the teaching of his philosophy), nor, I suppose, would a forger, had he written both letters. Egermann (p. 18) gives the impression that the difference between the two letters is a difference in subject matter, the one advising cessation of internal strife, the other, the abandonment of war against enemies outside Sicily (cf. p. 26). But the Eighth Letter deals also with the setting

There is in fact another way of accounting for the main content of the Eighth Letter. According to Plutarch, Dion, toward the end of his life, had in mind "to establish and set in order a mixture of democracy and royalty, somewhat after the Spartan and Cretan fashion, wherein an aristocracy should preside and administer the most important affairs" (53, 2). He also proposed to send for commissioners from Corinth to draw up a new constitution (*ibid.*). Finally, Plutarch knows of a rumor, spread by Callippus, to the effect that Dion "had made up his mind" to make Apollocrates, the son of Dionysius, his successor, since he was his wife's nephew and his sister's grandson (56, 1). If it cannot be the Dion, or the Plato, of the Seventh Letter who asserts at the end of the Eighth Epistle: "This is what I planned for you when I was alive, and it is still my plan now" (357 A), it could well be Plutarch's Dion. The author of the Epistle is, I suggest, familiar with the tradition which survives in Plutarch's biography and which in many respects seems to preserve the character and the intentions of Dion more faithfully than the autobiography.<sup>67)</sup>

But if the Eighth Letter cannot be the work of the writer of the Seventh Letter, a work composed in different circumstances, it is a companion piece to the Seventh Letter, composed by someone else. For the author of the Eighth Letter is undoubtedly also familiar with the *apologia*. Some material must have been taken over from it though it is embellished and restated in a slightly different language.<sup>68)</sup> But out of his two sources he weaves together a story of his own. Perhaps he was even instigated to do this by a remark

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up of laws, a matter of great concern to the Seventh Letter (336 D ff.), and of course both epistles deal with the question of which kind of government ought to be installed.

<sup>67)</sup> For Plutarch's version of Dion's story, see above, pp. 32 ff. (Harward [*ad* 356 C 1] has noted the similarity between this passage and Plutarch, *Dion*, 53. He does not, of course, draw the conclusion I have drawn concerning the authorship of the letter.) It is interesting that according to 357 A-B, those barbarians who fought in defense of the common liberty are not to be deprived of their land. Plutarch tells that Dion, upon landing in Sicily, accepted the help of Carthaginians (25, 4).

<sup>68)</sup> Cf. above, pp. 145 f. (the agreement on the policy against the barbarians—an invention of the Seventh Letter—seems especially significant). It is harder to decide whether the Eighth Letter shares with the Third the assumption that Plato advised Dionysius to change the tyranny into a monarchy or whether the Third Letter took this motif from the Eighth. But since the Third Letter treats the constitutional change as a matter of fact, it seems more likely to me that the Eighth Letter precedes the Third.



made in the *apologia*. One of Plato's reasons for keeping out of Dion's war was his wish to be free to help in case the enemies of today "should ever come to care at all for mutual friendship" (351 D). The Eighth Letter gives Plato an opportunity to be of assistance in bringing about peace. And it allows him to remain faithful to both his friends, to Dion as well as to Dionysius, for the latter is to share his power with the son of Dion.<sup>69)</sup>

It was once conjectured that the Eighth Letter was written by someone who lived in the middle of the third century. The many inaccuracies in the representation of early Sicilian history do indeed make such a hypothesis almost credible.<sup>70)</sup> On the other hand, the document can be understood if one takes it to be a picture of Plato's position concerning the events that took place at the very end of his life. The language and the style of the letter certainly do not betray any Hellenistic influence. As for the identity of its author, one must be satisfied in this case as in the case of the Seventh Letter and of all the other epistles with a vague "someone."<sup>71)</sup>

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<sup>69)</sup> In this respect, then, the Seventh and the Eighth Letters seem to stand against the Fourth and the Third Letters, which presuppose that Plato has turned to actively supporting Dion (above, notes 18; 38), though Plato insists on his never failing concern for reconciliation (316 E).

<sup>70)</sup> It was Adam who dated the letter in the time of Agathocles, who was a friend of the Sicilians and followed in the footsteps of Dion and Timoleon (*Archiv f. Gesch. d. Philol.*, 1909, pp. 32 f.; between 272-241 [the same, "Über die Echtheit d. platon. Briefe," *Programm*, Berlin, 1906, p. 25]). This would not fit in badly with the interpretation of the passage on the Opicians as referring to the Romans (Adam, *Programm*, p. 7). The historical inaccuracies concern the office given to Dionysius the Elder (353 B) and the stoning to death of the ten generals (354 D-E). (On these difficulties, see Morrow, pp. 84 f. and Harward, *ad loc.*). There is also the difficulty that according to the Eighth Letter Dion's son, Hipparinus, is still alive, while according to Plutarch he dies before his father. (The evidence is discussed by Harward, pp. 195 f. and Morrow, pp. 85 ff.; see also Egermann, pp. 48 ff.). While the historical errors, which cannot be interpreted away, would be hard to understand if Plato were the author of the letter, they seem less astonishing if one assumes that the author is a *littérateur*, writing after Timoleon (and this must be the case, since he borrows from the Seventh Letter; see also above, note 51).

<sup>71)</sup> One can nevertheless characterize the author of the Eighth Letter, as one can the author of the Seventh Letter (though this is not true of the authors of the rest of the letters, I am afraid). Adam calls him an intelligent imitator (*Arch. f. Gesch. d. Philos.*, p. 32) and one cannot quarrel with this characterization. Bury thinks of the letter as a philosophic manifesto which could not make a serious contribution to practical politics (*Prefatory Note*, p. 568). But though the demand to install three kings chosen from the warring factions may seem unrealistic, the author considers himself a realist, and he

## 5. THE BACKGROUND OF THE COLLECTION OF LETTERS

One fact emerges clearly from my brief analysis of the so-called Platonic letters: they do not form a unity. Contrary to what is most often claimed nowadays, not even the most important letters reveal "the successful assumption of the character of the supposed writer." <sup>72)</sup> For the Plato of the letters has a chameleonic personality. His actions and reactions are ever-changing. Once he is devoted to the interests of his friends; once, his personal advantage determines his decisions. At one time, he is resolved never to forget the kindness shown him by Dionysius; at another, he abandons him. He refuses to help Dion, and then supports him; he praises him as the keenest youth he ever met and as a man of the highest moral qualities, and then points out faults he finds in him; he protests his faithfulness to Dion's cause, and then again, pleads that of his bitterest enemy before him. The Sicilian adventure is to him the realization of his ideal of the philosopher-king as well as a fight for power which is to be settled, if not in "the second best way," then in a third way. And together with such variations, one finds philosophy defined as mere ethics, or esoteric and religious, an illumination that is not in need of dialectics or mathematical studies, demonstrative knowledge that requires ever-renewed discussion, a rationalism that determines actions, an abstract insight which is in need of practical experience. Even granted that the letters ostensibly cover a period of roughly twenty years in Plato's life, the changes one observes are too great for it to be plausible that the greater number of them were written by the same man. <sup>73)</sup>

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is certainly not a philosopher, as is the author of the Seventh Letter. Does he perhaps think of the attempts to make the successors of Alexander share in a unified government? As for the date of the Eighth Letter, it is now generally recognized that all the letters "must belong to a date not far removed from the death of Plato" (Harward, p. 64).

<sup>72)</sup> Harward, p. 69. (He exempts letters V, IX, X, XI and XII from this verdict.)

<sup>73)</sup> As I have mentioned (above, note 18), it is sometimes argued that the time which supposedly had elapsed between the writing of the various letters accounts for the change in Plato's attitude. I should add that as Plato changes, so do the other actors in the drama. Dion is seen more realistically in Ep. IV and VIII than in Ep. VII. Dionysius, an uneducated youth in Ep. VII and, though gifted, not stable or truly interested in philosophy, is, according to the other evidence, more like the prince who wrote dramatic works and philosophical treatises and bore his misfortunes not without dignity.

On the other hand, it is no less evident that the letters have many features in common. Most of them deal with Plato's share in the Sicilian enterprise and address themselves to men involved in it; certain themes reappear with variations. Why did Plato take part in the affairs of Sicily? What was the true cause of the break between him and Dionysius? Why did he not actively share in Athenian politics? What is the meaning of his written work? What was the true character of Dionysius or of Dion? To a large extent, the contradictions result from different views on the same subjects. This suggests, I think, that behind the various versions, there was one that gave rise to the others. The *apologia pro vita sua* would seem the document most likely to have provided the needed inspiration. Someone had to invent a letter-writing Plato, and the Seventh Epistle, which is richest in content, contains almost all the topics discussed in the rest of the letters. Moreover, its one-sided interpretation, the freedom with which it deals with historical data and also with Platonic philosophy, almost invite corrections and amplifications. They are provided by the authors of most of the other letters, who use the material of the autobiography, combining it at their pleasure with data from other sources, and give free reign to their own imaginations in questions of great significance as well as in those of little importance.<sup>74</sup>)

These expository letters, as it were, are, in addition to the Eighth, the four letters addressed to Dionysius, and the letter addressed to Dion, which are unified by their subject matter—the Sicilian enterprise. To them may be added, with less assurance to be sure, the Fifth and the Sixth Letters which, like the Seventh and Eighth, represent Plato as giving advice to others, and in political matters,

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<sup>74</sup>) An especially instructive example of the development of a minor point made in the Seventh Letter is the treatment of Archdemus. In the Seventh Letter he is said to be the one Pythagorean most highly esteemed by Plato (339 A), and on the command of Dionysius Plato later lodges with him (349 D). In Epistle II, he acts as a go-between for Dionysius and Plato (310 B). He will explain certain problems to the tyrant (312 D) and he will in the future relate Plato's answers to Dionysius' questions (313 D). In the Third Letter, he is one of those present at the conversation between Dionysius and Plato (319 A). It is not unimportant that Archdemus is known only from the Platonic letters. Another indication of the development of a topic is perhaps the use of *vaticinia ex eventu*, which, on my interpretation, first appear in the Seventh Letter, and are then used in others (cf. above, pp. 130; 134), a favorite device of writers who wish to glorify the heroes of the past by showing their foreknowledge of the future.

at that. <sup>75)</sup> The Ninth Letter should belong to the same group. Archytas is mentioned in the Seventh Letter and he is given advice in the Ninth, advice that carries the teaching of the autobiography to its extreme. The Eleventh, too, gives political counsel. But though both letters do, I believe, presuppose the existence of other Platonic letters, one cannot say that their authors must have had in mind the Seventh Epistle. Any of the other letters could have inspired them just as well, and the case is the same with regard to the tenth. <sup>76)</sup>

That all these letters were once single and independent documents is still reflected in the fact that the collection has no discernible order. This disarray is hardly due to lack of judgment on the part of those who brought them together and added them to the editions of Plato's writings, probably in early Alexandrian times. No matter how many attempts one may make to think of different arrangements, one can find none that is really satisfactory. Certainly, one cannot discover a plan according to which all of them could have been composed. <sup>77)</sup> Taken together, they do give a certain picture of Plato and of important phases of his life, but any reading that is more than cursory quickly dispels the belief that one is listening to a continuous account.

But if the letters are individual reports by different authors, if they are not genuine—and there is no conclusive evidence that any of the letters are Plato's; on the contrary, the evidence against their genuineness seems overwhelming—why were they invented? To this question, I have already given an answer, at least with

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<sup>75)</sup> Wilamowitz (above, note 48) attributed the Thirteenth Letter, which I have included in the number of epistles addressed to Dionysius, to a follower of the tyrant who intends to malign Plato. If this were true, the letter would, of course, belong to another category. But one can hardly argue for the special character of the Thirteenth Letter by pointing out the fact that it is not placed together with the other letter to Dionysius. The letters to Archytas, too, do not follow upon one another (IX and XII). Granted that the letters are meant to reveal Plato in his personal life, one can very well imagine an author for whom Plato's concern for his family was an appealing subject.

<sup>76)</sup> Moreover, Epistle XII was most likely composed in quite a different context (above, p. 127).

<sup>77)</sup> Contrary to Dornseiff (above, note 1). Harward too is of the opinion that the collection "is arranged in no sort of order" (p. 70). One cannot even speak of an arrangement according to addressees, for although some of the Dionysius letters stand together, one is set apart (see above, note 76). The letters to Dion's associates follow each other, but are separated from the letter to Dion (IV).

regard to the Seventh Letter. Some of the arguments adduced then hold true also for the other letters. Philosophy had become more closely allied with practical life. The Sicilian affair was of great interest to people at the end of the fourth century, and the majority of the letters, if not all of them, betray such an interest in contemporary, or nearly contemporary, events.<sup>78)</sup> But in the proliferation of the letters, in the renewed attempts to round out the picture of Plato's life, another motivating force was surely the wish men of all centuries have had to know the intimate details of the lives of the great, a wish all the stronger in the case of Plato, one should think, because in the many works he wrote, he says nothing about himself. And this motive was probably strengthened by the peculiarly Greek incentive for composing such letters, one which is well expressed in the second of the Platonic letters: Men of wisdom as well as of power, it says, are remembered, and when people "talk about Hiero or about Pausanias, the Lacedaemonian, they delight to bring in their meeting with Simonides and what he did and said then and they want to harp on Periander of Corinth and Thales of Miletus, and on Pericles and Anaxagoras and on Croesus also and Solon as wise men with Cyrus as potentate" (310 E-311 A).

Even the sophisticated are wont to listen to story-tellers, especially when the past can be recovered only through an effort of the imagination. In antiquity the invention of letters was designed to satisfy this kind of curiosity. For the ancient letters may well be defined as historical novels. They represent events from the point of view of the actors in the drama, and therefore usually have an apologetic tendency, though they are devoid of all sentimental introspection and are rich in descriptive detail. If they cannot be taken as a scholarly reconstruction of what happened, their value lies in that they show how the hero was seen by others.<sup>79)</sup>

<sup>78)</sup> Cf. above, pp. 56 ff.; 67. In the two generations after Plato material for a representation of the historical events must have been plentiful (above, p. 62). On the other hand, none of the letters seems a rhetorical exercise such as one finds in later centuries; rather, they reflect, with hardly any exceptions, the true concern with the founder of the Academy that one would expect in a period in which his memory was still alive. (On schools of rhetoric in the fourth century and their relation to epistolography, see Harward, pp. 63 f.; 68; on the fictitious material preserved from that century, see *R.E.*, Supplement V, s.v. Epistolographie, col. 210, 29 ff.)

<sup>79)</sup> Cf. *R.E.*, Supplement V, col. 214, 18 ff. In the fourth century, as Richards says, "the composition of such letters became a common thing"

It was, I think, as historical novels which had a general human interest and reflected the reaction of a relatively early period to Plato's life and work that the letters were added to the first editions of the dialogues. I cannot believe that the Alexandrian scholars were deceived about their spuriousness. They, too, must have seen that the variety of opinions expressed in the letters would be inexplicable were the epistles Plato's. However that may be, even if one letter—the seventh—were genuine, one would expect more uniformity in the tales told, a uniformity of pattern if not of detail. Thus the analysis of the *corpus* of the letters indirectly confirms the analysis of the autobiography. Seen in relation to the rest of the letters, it must also be judged as spurious.

In the modern debate, the most important consequence of regarding the seventh and other letters as genuine has perhaps been the claim that "the Academy was first of all a political organization, that its primary function and purpose was the defense of international conservatism." People, one says, "turned naturally to the Academy to ask for lawgivers and legislators, counsellors and experts." Or it is at least asserted that the Academy was an organization whose purpose among other things was "definitely political," and which was intended "to serve as a training-school for statesmen and public-spirited citizens."<sup>80</sup>

It is perhaps not amiss to point out that not even all the so-called Platonic letters bear out this conclusion. For while the letters to Perdiccas (V), to Hermias (VI), and to Laodamas (XI)

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(*Platonica*, p. 290), and it was, of course, not the intention of the authors to deceive anyone. Invention, in this instance, is not deliberate falsification. Divested of their pretense to Platonic origin and considered by themselves, these letters are still interesting documents. And such judgments as "Tollheit, kindisch" (Wilamowitz on the Second Letter) or, to counter the verdict, "Sarkasmus . . . Hohn" (Friedländer, I<sup>2</sup>, pp. 254 f.) are no longer appropriate, for they are in the last analysis determined by the fact that the interpreter argues for or against the genuineness of a letter. Incidentally, some ancient critics must have called all Platonic letters "public speeches" (δημηγορίαι; Dionysius of Halicarnassus [*On Demosthenes*, 23]), while Demetrius calls some of them "treatises" (συγγράμματα; *On Style*, 228) on account of their excessive length and stilted expression; Photius (Epist. 233 [Baletta]) notes that they lack Plato's eloquence and diverge from the usual epistolary style (cf. H. Raeder [*Rh. Mus.*, 61, 1906, p. 428, note 1], who rightly points out that none of these statements implies any doubt concerning the genuineness of the letters).

<sup>80</sup>) Morrow, p. 143. The first of the quotations given in the text is from A. D. Winspear, *The Genesis of Plato's Thought*, 1956<sup>2</sup>, p. 306, the second, from P. M. Schuhl, *Revue des Études Grecques*, 1946-7 (Winspear, p. 304).

may allow one to say that Plato stood ready to offer political advice and assistance to whomever requested it, the autobiography gives a distinctly different impression. Dion, urging Plato to come to Sicily, tries to convince him that "now if ever. . .all our hopes will be fulfilled of seeing the same persons at once philosophers and rulers of mighty States" (328 A). And, as Plato is made to say later on, when reflecting on Dionysius and the assassins of Dion, "both they and he have done the greatest injuries both to me and, one may say, to all the rest of mankind. . .if in that empire, philosophy and power had really been united in the same person the radiance thereof would have shone through the whole world of Greece and barbarians, and fully imbued them with the true conviction that no State nor any individual man can ever become happy unless he passes his life in subjection to justice combined with wisdom, whether it be that he possesses these virtues within himself or as the result of being reared and trained righteously under holy rulers in their ways" (335 C-D). Sicily, then, was to set an example to be followed by "the rest of mankind." This is what Plato had hoped to achieve by cooperating with Dion and Dionysius; this is what the viciousness and foolishness of men had prevented from happening. Clearly, even at the end of his life, the Plato of the Seventh Letter thought of his participation in Sicilian politics as a unique action, justified because it would have a unique effect. He can hardly be imagined as having made a concerted effort to bring influence to bear on all governments of his world and of his day.<sup>81)</sup>

## 6. CONCLUSION

But the fact remains that letters were composed in which Plato promises advice on monarchical government to Perdiccas, or explains to Hermias what philosophers can learn from statesmen and statesmen from philosophers, or again, counsels Laodamas on the means by which a right constitution can be established. And even the Plato of the Seventh Letter accepts pupils who do not devote themselves exclusively to philosophical studies—for one can be a student "occupied indeed in whatever occupation he may

<sup>81)</sup> I should mention that the Seventh Letter also insists on philosophical studies to a much greater extent than do the other letters. And it is interesting that when it deals with the advice Plato is wont to give, it mentions only private individuals and one's own city (331 A; C).

find himself" (340 D)—and he has worked out a test of philosophical abilities which is suitable in the case of tyrants (340 B; cf. 341 A). Thus, in some manner, all the letters seem to presuppose that one of Plato's main concerns is to make the influence of his philosophical views felt in actual politics and that he is therefore intent on educating a new generation of statesmen and advising those who already hold office. Why could this not have been true even if the specific content of the letters were invented? In view of the importance which the concept of the political Plato has for the modern interpretation of Platonism, it seems impossible to end the analysis of the letter without giving an answer to this question.

In trying to do so, it will be well to recall that according to the trustworthy evidence preserved the Academy of Plato was a free association of philosophers and scholars who lived together for longer or shorter periods, exchanging views, but pursuing their own work and following their own bent of mind. Plato was not the headmaster of this Academy; he was its revered founder, the inspiring genius of the discussions held by its members. I have no desire to deny that on occasion he also gave lectures. Nor can it be said, obviously, that there were no students; the example of Aristotle proves that young men were admitted to the circle of the older members and received an education through the "philosophizing together" that was characteristic of the life in this spiritual community. Plato's Academy was not an academy or a university in the modern sense of the words; nor was it a training-center or, properly speaking, a school at all.<sup>82)</sup>

One would indeed be hard pressed to say what pupils were to learn in the Academy of Plato. To be sure, the dialogues refer to studies which prepare the devotee of philosophy for the ascent to the realm of Ideas, and it is the studies which Plato enumerates in the *Republic* which later came to be called "the liberal arts." But he does not commit himself to a formal program of "higher education." Much as he is concerned in the *Laws* with outlining a curriculum for school children, he avoids setting forth the subjects to be studied by the future philosopher, or "regulations either for the length of time to be given to the single subjects or for the order in which they shall be taken up" (XII, 968 D). The dialogues in-

<sup>82)</sup> See in general Cherniss, *The Riddle of the Early Academy*, chap. III (and of the literature there quoted, especially E. Howald, *Die platonische Akademie und die moderne Universitas Litterarum*, 1921); also *A.J.P.*, 1962, pp. 21 f.



investigate problems, but are sparing of conclusions. Rather than laying down a dogma, they call for further search. To be sure, they show a "way of life." But it is one of individual responsibility and self-reliance for him who wishes to find the truth.<sup>83)</sup>

The situation changed in the Old Academy, at any rate, under the leadership of Xenocrates. As I mentioned before, he systematized Plato's philosophy; in his hands it became a doctrine that could be taught and learnt. Xenocrates seems to have had many pupils though none of them was to become a distinguished philosopher.<sup>84)</sup> Whether or not it was the precedent of the Aristotelian school—which was perhaps the prototype of all ancient philosophical schools—that brought about the change, the Academy was now an educational institution. The author of the Seventh Letter, who must have been a younger contemporary of Xenocrates, is well aware of this. His Plato quite outspokenly teaches "a doctrine and a life" (328 A). And as he admits part-time students, as it were, so he is an advocate of a "liberal education" (334 B), an education which to him is synonymous with philosophy, or "philosophical training" (345 C). The term "liberal education" is foreign to the dialogues.<sup>85)</sup>

The change in organization which the Academy underwent points to a by far greater change in the position which philosophy came to occupy in the intellectual life of Greece, a change that was not without consequence for the relation between philosophy and actual politics. In Plato's time, poetry and oratory had still been the forces shaping men's thought and decisions. With the breakdown of the city states and the rise of the new monarchies, the significance of

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<sup>83)</sup> I think it is permissible to use the term "way of life" (cf. *Republic*, VII, 523 B; *Symposium*, 211 C-D) though, as Novotny (*ad Ep.* VII, 328 a 4) has noticed, the dialogues never advocate a Platonic way of life, but speak of a Pythagorean kind of life (*Republic*, X, 600 B). For *Laws*, XII, 968 D, cf. the following note.

<sup>84)</sup> On Xenocrates, see Wilamowitz, *Platon*,<sup>3</sup> p. 579.

<sup>85)</sup> Plato, if I am not mistaken, speaks but of the contrast between the free man (the philosopher) and the slave (the uneducated); see *Theaetetus*, 175 D-E; *Laws*, IX, 875 C-D; also *Republic*, VII, 536 E; *Sophist*, 253 C. On the subjects of instruction in the dialogues, cf. Wilamowitz, *Platon*,<sup>3</sup> pp. 389 f. The *Epinomis* starts from the observation that the *Laws* has not defined a curriculum for the philosopher (973 A-B; cf. 991 D ff.) and tries to give what was left out in that dialogue. The author of the Seventh Letter may have been prompted by the same passage to speak of his philosophy as the new "liberal education" (in addition to the passages quoted in the text, see 334 B; 334 D; 345 B).

philosophy, of philosophical training, was recognized. The philosophical schools became the refuge of all those who wished for guidance, and gradually usurped the place that poetry and oratory, or the publicism of Isocrates, had held in earlier days. Philosophical instruction was sought even by political rulers. In the first half of the fourth century, Epaminondas, the pupil of the Pythagorean Lysis, is the only statesman who was assuredly guided by philosophy. After Aristotle, who had been called upon to be the teacher of Alexander, some of his successors joined the Peripatos and helped to carry out its scientific program. At the turn of the fourth century to the third, the Stoa, too, had adherents among men of politics.<sup>86)</sup>

The first Platonists whom tradition mentions as leading statesmen of a Greek city were members of the Academy of Arcesilaus. The Academy of the two generations after Plato at least had political affiliations and concerns. Speusippus, who had participated in Dion's war against Dionysius, tried, it seems, to win the favor of Philip of Macedonia. Xenocrates, who had accompanied Plato to Sicily, was a trusted and loyal denizen of Athens, so devoted to the democratic regime that the citizens asked him to intercede on their behalf when the foreign king made unjust demands upon them.<sup>87)</sup> And out of these political contacts there began to grow literary relationships. Alexander is reported to have asked Xenocrates to counsel him on kingship (Plutarch, *Adv. Coloten*, 32, 1126 D), just as Aristotle had once done in his *Alexander, or about Colonists*, and probably in his *On Monarchy* (Diogenes Laertius, V, 22). Considering these facts, considering the circumstance that the rival school of the Peripatos entertained close relations with the successor of Alexander who ruled over Athens, it is perhaps not astonishing that letters of Plato should be composed in which he addresses himself to potentates or others in political power, or that he should teach philosophy even to those who are otherwise

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<sup>86)</sup> See Wilamowitz, "Antigonos von Karystos," *Phil. Unters.* 4, 1881, pp. 217; 232, note 66 (in his famous excursus on "Die Philosophenschulen u. die Politik," from which I have drawn much of my material).

<sup>87)</sup> For Speusippus and Xenocrates, see Wilamowitz, *Platon*<sup>3</sup>, pp. 575 f.; 579; also *Philol. Unters.*, pp. 183; 195; on the Platonists in Megalopolis, cf. Plutarch, *Philopoimen*, 1 (and Wilamowitz, *Philol. Unters.*, p. 211). The story relating that Plato was invited to give laws to Megalopolis (above, I, note 147) may well be a reflection of this later influence of the Academy on the administration of Megalopolis (cf. Wilamowitz, *Platon*, p. 385; note 2; also *Philol. Unters.*, pp. 207 ff., on Polemon and on Crates as ambassador to King Pyrrhus).

occupied. The situation that prevailed in a later time is here transposed into the time of the founder of the Academy. <sup>88)</sup>

It is, then, by no means true that the so-called Platonic letters warrant any conclusions concerning the political purposes that Plato and his Academy might have had. On the contrary, the very fact that the letters create the impression that Plato had a political program and that he tried to convert others to it through an exchange of letters with statesmen all over the world is another indication of the novelistic character of the epistles, of their seeing the past through the eyes of another generation. To be sure, the discussions in the Academy were concerned not only with metaphysical problems, or with problems of natural science, but also with the problems of government, and Plato was greatly interested in questions of politics. But it was the theory of politics, not practical politics that captivated him. <sup>89)</sup>

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<sup>88)</sup> On the fifth Platonic letter and its possible relation to Speusippus, see Wilamowitz, *Platon*<sup>3</sup>, p. 576, note 1. How wide-spread the influence of the Peripatos was is indicated by the fact that the law of Sophocles, which in 307 B.C. put the philosophical schools under state supervision, was in the main directed against that school (Wilamowitz, *Philol. Unters.*, pp. 194 f.; also *Platon*<sup>3</sup>, p. 581). Another determining factor in the composition of the letters must surely have been the tendency to assimilate Platonism to Pythagoreanism. For the Pythagoreans, philosophy and politics were closely related.

<sup>89)</sup> It is perhaps characteristic of Plato that the dialogues fail to comment on any of the great political events that took place during his life time, the supremacy and decay of Sparta, the rebirth of Athenian strength, the unprecedented rise of Thebes (Wilamowitz, *Platon*<sup>3</sup>, pp. 386 f.; this at least is true if the *Menexenus* is not genuine).

## CONCLUSION

In my inquiry into the genuineness of the Seventh Letter, I proceeded from the assumption that the document is, as it claims to be, Plato's own work. The representation of his early life and of his attitude toward political action raised the first doubts concerning the authenticity of the letter. These doubts were confirmed by an analysis of the advice Plato is said to have given Dionysius. In part, the political counsel attributed to him presupposes a historical situation that existed only after Plato's death. A scrutiny of the philosophical digression also led to the result that Plato could not be the author of the letter. A doctrine such as that outlined in the *apologia* is not to be found in the Platonic dialogues. In fact, it appears to contradict the basic tenets of Platonism. Finally, when the epistle was considered as one of the many epistles which tradition has preserved under Plato's name, it again became evident that the autobiography could not be what it pretends to be—Plato's own account of his life and his activities.

Questions of the genuineness of literary documents are difficult to decide, and the certainty of the results depends to a large extent on the circumstances of the particular case. Could it be shown that the style and the terminology of the Seventh Letter are unplatonic, its unauthenticity could, I suppose, be demonstrated most simply and directly. When thrown back upon internal evidence, the interpreter faces a harder task, as is evidenced by the unceasing debate about the genuineness of some of the Platonic dialogues. Moreover, in this controversy it is not the least of the difficulties that Plato himself provides few clues to the solution of the problems which the critic has to solve. The dialogues hide rather than reveal their author. The very form in which his philosophy is set forth poses a riddle. If it is a challenge to state concisely what Plato said, it is an even greater challenge to state in positive terms what he meant, and what position he occupies with regard to the arguments he presents with such brilliance and lucidity.

Naturally, all these factors enter into the discussion of the genuineness of the letter, and thus the interpreter—whether he speaks in favor of the authenticity of the Seventh Epistle or against it—is forced to exercise special caution. I have at least tried not to

lose sight of this obligation. When inferring the character of Plato, the man, from the character of Plato, the writer, the convictions he held from the convictions he advocated, I have admitted the uncertainty of the conclusions, though it would seem that the principle of *in dubio pro reo* is as valid in the court of history as it is in the court of law. In speaking about Plato's philosophy, I have restricted myself to those features of his doctrine which are most generally considered its essential elements and which are to be found in the writings from all periods of Plato's literary career. I have at the same time refrained from all conjectures concerning the content of his teaching in the Academy. The dialogues are, after all, the only indubitable source of information for a reconstruction of Plato's views.

Even within a frame of reference thus severely limited, it becomes clear, I believe, that the Seventh Letter cannot possibly be the work of Plato's hand. The author of the *Republic* and the *Laws* can hardly have thought of these books as mere words; he can hardly have apologized for advising a young tyrant to become a philosopher. He could not be a proponent of *isonomia* without abandoning the political theory he had devised, without violating the injunction he still upheld in the last of his dialogues which he was composing at the very time at which he was supposedly writing the letter to Dion and his followers. And the philosophy of the Five is certainly not the theory of Ideas defended in the Platonic writings. Insight for Plato is not a gift bestowed upon the elect alone.

As concerns this last point, it is, of course, quite possible to argue that Plato's views changed toward the end of his life and that the written works fail to reflect this change. The argument loses in strength, I think, if I am right in maintaining that the letter gives up the transcendence of the Ideas, that there is a gulf between its mysticism and Plato's intellectual vision. At any rate, no one can use statements made in the letter for interpreting the development in Plato's thought without having first shown why the philosophical digression should be considered genuine. For it occurs in a historical narrative whose genuineness is open to question. Nay, the spuriousness of this narrative seems to be assured not merely by internal evidence, but also by external criteria. Many details of the story have been rejected by ancient historians who, fully aware of the Platonic version, felt justified in giving a different account of what happened. The comparison of the Plato

of the letter with Timoleon tends to prove that the writer of the autobiography lived after Plato. What, then, is the reason for assuming that he had any knowledge of a philosophy of Plato's that is in contradiction with the content of the dialogues? Finally, if it is maintained that the theory proposed in the letter is at least compatible with suggestions made by Plato, or that it follows from these suggestions, it is fair to reply that it is just as possible that some one other than Plato developed his teaching along the lines he had indicated. And this, considering the case as a whole, is, I think, the more "likely account" (*Timaeus*, 29 D).

Allowance made for the difficult circumstances in which judgment has to be passed, then, it would seem that the Seventh Letter is neither the advice Plato gave to Dion's followers nor a manifesto which he addressed to the world at large, hoping that it would be read by everyone. The *apologia pro vita sua* is, rather, a defense made by a later Platonist in answer to attacks on Plato's personality and on the part he played in one of the great historical events of his time. It tells what Plato's critics and enemies thought, and how their objections were met by those who sided with Plato. But the intention to exonerate Plato, though it is made to appear as the main motive for the composition of the letter, is in fact subordinate to the intention to interpret Plato. In detailing the advice Plato gave to Dion and Dionysius, in setting forth Plato's advice to Dion's followers, the forger formulates what he regards as the essence of Plato's political theory, as the principles that according to Plato should guide the rulers of all earthly states. In telling of Plato's futile attempt to make Dionysius a philosopher on the throne, he states what to him is the true meaning of Platonism and tries—once and for all—to adjudicate the differences that had arisen among the successors of Plato with regard to the understanding of the Master's doctrine.

As a contribution to the polemic carried on in the old Academy, the Seventh Letter is of great interest. For although its author shares some of the opinions of his fellow Platonists, he also has views of his own. But the value of the document consists merely in what it tells about the history of the interpretation of Platonism. One cannot learn from the autobiography how Plato himself saw his life, nor what he thought about his Sicilian adventure, nor which were his last thoughts on the theory of Ideas. Faithful to his conviction that "always talking about persons is a thing least befitting

the philosopher" (*Republic*, VI, 500 B), Plato never spoke about himself. He never justified himself and refrained from answering the attacks made upon him and his political friendships. The philosopher, as he says, "cannot engage in an exchange of abuse, for never having made a study of anyone's peculiar weaknesses, he has no personal scandal to bring up" (*Theaetetus*, 174 C). In philosophical matters, too, he preserved to the last his anonymity. The only glimpse one can catch of him and of his thought comes from an empathetic study of his dialogues.

As in recent times so in earlier centuries, the divergent opinions held concerning the genuineness of the Seventh Letter have had a decisive bearing on the image one has had of Plato. For the dialogues uphold the supremacy of theoretical reason over practical reason. They accept the verdict that the philosopher must seem ridiculous to men in general because in gazing up at the stars, he tumbles down a well (*Theaetetus*, 174, A-B). But if he flounders in the affairs of the day where others are sure of their footing, he scales with ease the heights on which they feel dizzy (*ibid.*). And this ascent is the turning of the soul from "a day whose light is darkness to the veritable day" (*Republic*, VII, 521 C). The world of appearance can be truly understood only by those who have seen the light beyond. Those who do not understand this fall prey to "spectacles," to the bewitching power of the bodily eye, and are deprived of the eye of the mind, they are "doxophilists rather than philosophers" (V, 480 A). The Plato of the Seventh Letter is more sober in his outlook; he is a realist, though in the end he finds a last refuge in mysticism. He is interested not in what ought to be, but in what is. Action for him takes precedence over contemplation. It is practical intelligence rather than theoretical reason which he cherishes. The understanding of Plato has varied according to which of the two philosophies has been accepted as his, and both have proved to be appealing throughout the ages. But the voice that speaks from the autobiography is, I believe, not the voice of the historical Plato.

## APPENDIX

The tendency to isolate the interpretation of the philosophical digression from that of the rest of the letter (see above, pp. 167 f.) is illustrated by two essays which I saw (through the kindness of Dr. J. Sachs of the Institute for Advanced Study) after my manuscript had been finished: W. Bröcker's "Der philosophische Exkurs in Platons Siebentem Brief" (*Hermes*, 91, 1963, pp. 416 ff.), and H. G. Gadamer's "Dialektik und Sophistik im siebenten platonischen Brief" (*S. B. Heidelberg*, Philol. Hist. Klasse, 1964, 2). Bröcker assumes that there is a genuine "Urbrief" since he believes that no one but Plato could have written 341 B-D, the passage on the impossibility of writing about the first principles of nature (p. 424). But he claims that 342 A 1-344 C 1—the philosophical digression—is an insertion, entirely unneeded and even interrupting the context (p. 418; it is, of course, true that 342 A connects with 344 C; the remarks in between are expressly introduced as a digression). And he holds that this insertion consists of two parts: one Platonic in spirit, though there is nothing in the dialogues which corresponds to it exactly, the other unplatonic and added by the man who fitted the digression into the "Urbrief" (p. 424). But the "Urbrief"—which has the length of a dialogue such as the *Meno*—cannot be proved genuine on the basis of 341 B-D (for the argument "who else but Plato?", see above, p. 118), and if the historical narrative is spurious, its author could well be the forger of the philosophical digression (for the place of the digression within the whole letter, see above, pp. 109 f.). Gadamer regards the excursus as an intrinsic part of the letter, but in his opinion it cannot contain the fundamental views of Plato because an open letter is not a dialogue or a "Lehrschrift"; the digression must therefore be interpreted as an exoteric presentation of Plato's thought (p. 9, note 9). The force of this "hermeneutic principle" could be admitted only if it were shown by a close scrutiny of the narrative that the letter is an "open letter" of Plato's. If this is not the case, it does not follow that the digression can give no epistemological theory, and can have only methodological importance. Moreover, whether or not there is an esoteric teaching of Plato, it seems unjustified to take the philosophical digression as a propaedeutic lecture which Plato



often gave so as to create in his pupils the right attitude toward philosophical instruction (pp. 9 f.). For the letter characterizes the digression as an argument that "confronts the man who ventures to write anything at all" on the last principles (342 A). For this reason, I cannot follow Gadamer in his attempt to understand the teaching of the letter in the last analysis by reference to what Aristotle tells about Plato's unwritten doctrine (pp. 30-33), a report with which the Seventh Letter has nothing in common. As the digression puts it, after one has read the more extended discussion, the subject treated before "will perhaps be clearer" (342 A), and the excursus is understandable in itself and in relation to the dialogues.